

THE
MEDICINE
LADY

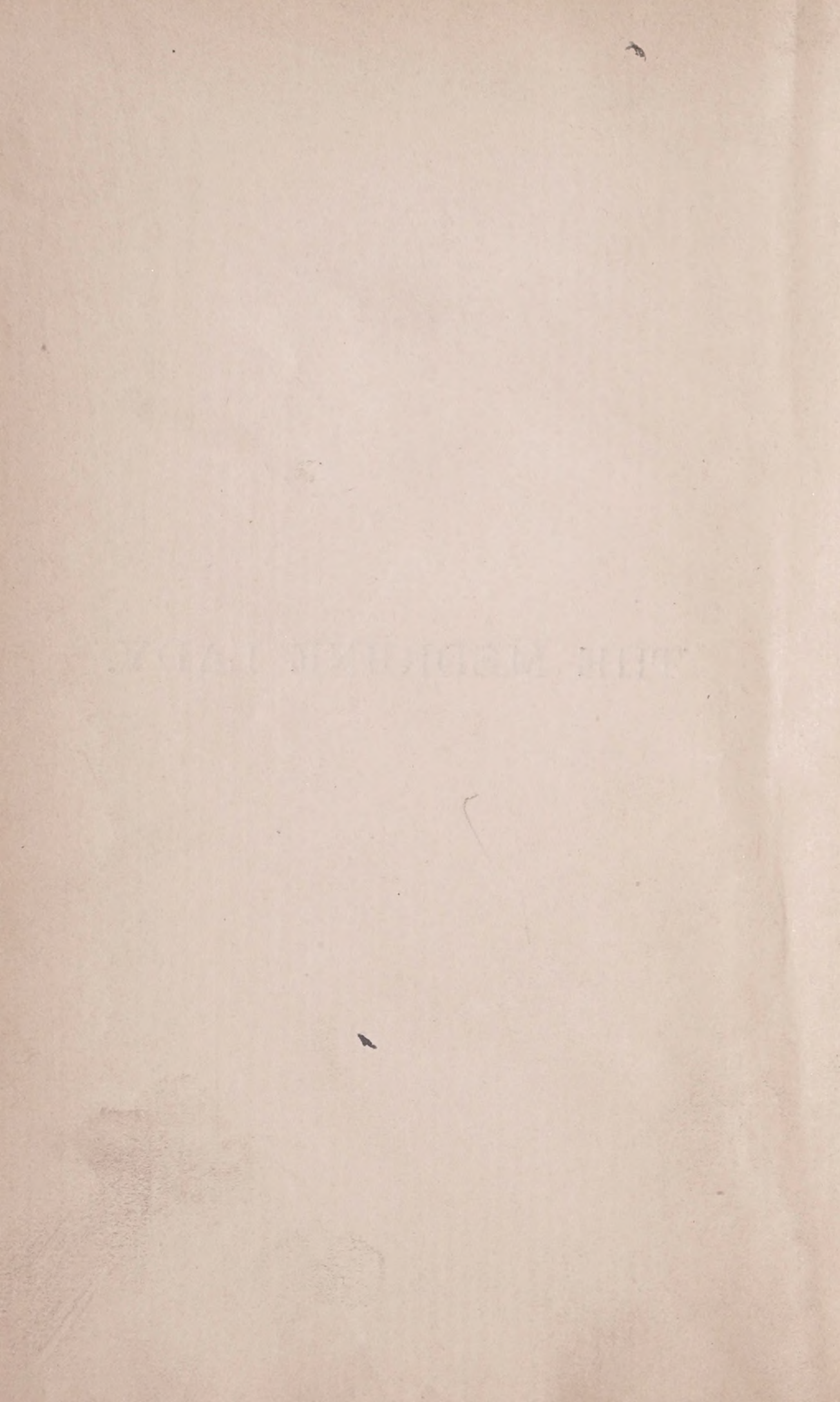
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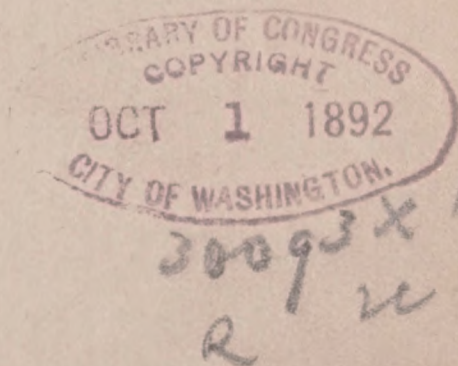
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.



THE
MEDICINE LADY

BY
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AUTHOR OF "OUT OF THE FASHION," "A SWEET GIRL GRADUATE," "POLLY,
A NEW-FASHIONED GIRL," "A WORLD OF GIRLS," ETC.



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THE MEDICINE LADY

Book I.—Doctors and Probationers.

CHAPTER I.

NUMBER THREE.

It was in the early winter of 1870, on a certain night in the dreary month of November, that a small incident occurred in the children's ward of St. Christopher's Hospital, East London, which affected the lives and destinies of several people.

There was nothing particularly exciting in the incident itself; it is only worth recording because it commenced a somewhat remarkable story.

In the month of November the children's ward at St. Christopher's was always full. On this particular night there were no empty cots, each had its occupant. The night nurse who had charge of the ward had gone her rounds, and tucked up each small patient. She had not kissed any of them, for that was not her way. She was an excellent nurse, highly trained, and thought a great deal of for her skill, her promptitude, her nerve, but she was not tender, nor did she draw out the affections of any of her little patients.

Sister Agatha walked down each side of the long ward, and then, satisfied that all the cases were doing well, she sat down in her own particular comfortable chair, and opening a book began to read by the light of a shaded lamp. She was waiting for the house physician to make his rounds. He might come into the ward at any moment; on the other hand he might be engaged with important cases in other parts of the

great hospital, and so be unable to put in an appearance for an hour or two.

Sister Agatha opened her book, and began to read comfortably. The children were all going to sleep. The critical cases had taken turns for the better; the convalescents were fast returning to health. She breathed a sigh of thankfulness as this thought swept through her mind, for she took a deep professional interest in all the children in her ward. It was to her credit that they should get well; she hated to hear any of the other nurses say that Sister Agatha had lost one of her cases. Such a fact hurt her pride and took from her prestige. She was not an affectionate woman, but perhaps it was her pride of spirit, perhaps her intense devotion to duty, which made her the most trusted and valued nurse in the whole great hospital.

As she sat and read, a door at one end of the ward was softly opened, and a slim girl dressed in the dark plain uniform of a probationer entered. She cast a swift anxious glance at the ward nurse, who sat far away with her shaded lamp at the other end of the great room. Then tripping noiselessly across the ward she approached a little cot, went down on her knees by the side of the bed, and took a child's hot hand between both her own.

"How are you feeling now, Tommy?" she asked. Her voice was scarcely above a whisper. The child whom she addressed could barely be distinguished in the subdued light of the ward. His eyes were shut when the nurse spoke to him. He opened them wide at her question, stared at her, smiled, and pursed up his lips for a kiss.

"Tommy so tired," he murmured. He shut his eyes again, the faint, sweet, patient smile still lingering round his baby face.

The nurse put her hand very softly on the child's forehead—it burned. She felt the pulse in the tiny wrist—it beat so fast as to be almost past counting. She listened to the breathing, which was shallow and rapid. The child seemed afraid to move his limbs, his hot lips were dry with thirst and a painfully anxious expression quickly chased the smile from his small face.

After a moment's reflection the nurse rose from her kneeling position, and went quickly down the ward. She walked so deftly that not a board creaked. Her movements were rapid her face worked as if she were about to cry, and there was a suppressed passion in her voice.

"Sister Agatha, little Tommy is very ill, had I not better fetch Dr. Digby?"

When the nurse spoke in her agitated, almost broken voice, Sister Agatha threw down the book she was reading, and looked at her with a long full stare.

"Number Two or Number Three? What number do you refer to? I don't know whom you mean by Tommy."

"The baby, the little fellow of three, Tommy Constantine, who has acute rheumatism—he is worse."

"Indeed! I did not know you had qualified as a physician. May I ask what you are doing in my ward at this hour, Nurse Harvey?"

"I felt anxious about Tommy."

"Will you have the goodness to return to your own duties, and allow me to attend to mine?"

The girl's face turned very white, her lips quivered, she attempted to say something, but words failed her. Sister Agatha's calm gray eyes had a crushing effect. Nurse Harvey turned slowly and left the ward.

"I hate those lady nurses," whispered the Sister to herself. "They are all alike—all absolutely unfitted for the work. What can a mixture of nerves and sentiment do in a children's ward in East London? We want people of harder, firmer caliber here. I can't say I like that girl. The sooner she leaves the better. It is a piece of unwarrantable impertinence on her part to come and report to me on my own patient's case. What *can* she know about sick children? She has only been here a month. Tommy Constantine was going on as well as possible when I tucked him up and turned his pillow half an hour ago."

Sister Agatha's calm face looked quite flushed with annoyance. She opened her book and went on reading. The book was interesting, and she had been quite pleasantly entertained with its contents a few minutes ago. Now her attention was diverted. Notwithstanding her calm she could not help giving a thought to the youngest and prettiest child in the ward. After a moment's struggle with her pride, for surely Number Three *must* be going on well, she rose, and, shaded lamp in hand, went to pay the baby of the ward a visit.

When Sister Agatha looked at Tommy he had so completely changed his position that she could not get a glimpse of his face; she only saw a tangled mass of bright hair above the bed-clothes.

She spoke the child's name softly, he did not stir.

"I won't wake him," she said to herself. "It's just as I thought. The little fellow is feverish, of course, but there are no alarming symptoms. That tiresome girl must be taught to know her place. I shall speak to her most severely to-morrow. She committed a distinct breach of discipline when she came into my ward after the children were settled for the night."

The Sister returned to her seat. Her calm face was still slightly flushed, and it was with a decided sigh of relief that she heard a quick step in the corridor outside.

The door of the children's ward was opened briskly but noiselessly, and the house physician came in.

He was a tall, loosely built man, with a keen expression on his eager face and filling his bright deepset eyes.

Sister Agatha came forward at once to greet him.

"You are later than usual, Dr. Digby," she said. "I am glad you have come at last."

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting, Sister," he replied. "I was delayed by some rather pressing cases in one of the men's wards. Now, what about the lambs of the flock? Are they doing well?"

"Yes," answered Sister Agatha. Her "yes" had the faintest tinge of uncertainty in it. Her thoughts went like a flash to Tommy Constantine. A quick half fear darted through her heart. Was the baby with the bright hair really worse?

Sister Agatha felt half inclined to say something special about Tommy to the doctor, but pride kept her silent.

It was too ridiculous to attach any consequence to the words of that silly young probationer. Sister Agatha had herself seen Number Three a moment ago. He was feverish, of course, his breathing was hurried, but he was sound asleep. The disease from which he was suffering must take its course; there were, she felt sure, no complications.

Her hesitating "yes" was followed by cheerful words.

"I have a good report to give you this evening, Dr. Digby. The children are most of them asleep, and, I may confidently say, they are all somewhat better than when you saw them last."

"That is well," replied the doctor. "We will go round the ward now, Sister."

His voice was a little brusque, although pleasant in tone.

The doctor and the nurse began the round of the ward.

Sister Agatha went first, carrying her shaded lamp. Dr. Digby followed.

By most of the cots he only lingered long enough to glance at the temperature card which hung beside each cot; in a few cases he laid his great strong hand for a passing instant on a little forehead.

The expression of approval on his face grew more marked as he passed each bed.

"Doing well—doing capitally," was his comment to the nurse.

The house physician's few words were always highly valued, and Sister Agatha's placid face almost shone with satisfaction.

Just then there came a sound which startled the doctor and nurse.

It was the smothered, but agonized cry, of a child waking suddenly out of sleep.

Dr. Digby hurried with two strides to the cot from which the sound proceeded. Sister Agatha, lamp in hand, followed him as quickly as she could.

Tommy Constantine's blue eyes were wide open, and he was uttering feeble shriek after shriek in mingled pain and terror.

The next moment the terrified sobs stopped—a smile quivered round the pretty little mouth, and the eyes became all aflame with love and happiness.

The tall young probationer had once again, unbidden, entered the ward. She came up to Tommy, knelt by him, kissed his forehead, and held his hot hands in hers.

Her probationer's cap, insecurely fastened, fell back from her head, revealing its noble contour, and showing a flash of sunshine in the hair, which was nearly as bright as the baby's.

Sister Agatha's eyes gave forth a steely gleam of wrath at Nurse Harvey, but Dr. Digby spoke approvingly.

"You are fond of this little fellow, Nurse?" he said. "That is well. Stay with him by all means. Sister Agatha"—the doctor's voice unconsciously took a stern tone—"this child is very much worse. I should have been summoned before. There is a sudden development of fluid in the pericardium." The doctor applied the stethoscope as he spoke; he was silent for a moment, listening to the sounds which proceeded from the child's laboring chest.

"There is a most marked impediment to the heart's action,"

he said, "and the temperature is very high. I do not like the child's condition at all—it will be necessary to relieve the pressure at once. I will go and fetch my aspirator, and be back in a moment."

He left the ward. Sister Agatha put down her shaded lamp, and went to make one or two necessary preparations. Her face did not show an atom of emotion. The probationer went on holding the sick child's hands, her bright head bent a little lower, and a little lower, until it touched the lovely little head on the pillow.

Dr. Digby came back with the surgical instrument necessary for performing the operation. It contained a long needle, which was meant to pierce the pericardium, or bag which surrounds the heart, and get at the fluid which would soon suffocate the little victim. There were tubes and a bottle attached to the needle.

"Get up," said Sister Agatha to Nurse Harvey. "Don't make a fool of yourself, with your cap off, too!" she continued in a whisper. "Kneel here where you can hold the bottle for the doctor. I will take Tommy's hands in mine."

"I can't witness an operation," said the probationer suddenly. "If there's to be an operation, I'll run away and come back soon. I—I—*can't* witness it! I—I—never could bear to look at suffering!"

"Don't be silly," said Dr. Digby, in a kind, firm voice. "Moments are precious; your help is needed. You have nerve, I am sure. Exercise it. Forget yourself."

His voice was bracing—his quick, kind glance was even more bracing. The probationer took the bottle attached to the aspirator in her trembling hands. The doctor instructed her where to kneel, and made the necessary preparations for the operation.

"Now, Tommy," he said, "be a man. I'm going to hurt you a little. Afterward you will be ever so much better. You'll feel jolly after I've done—now Tommy."

Tommy's blue eyes were transfixed with horror. He looked piteously at Sister Agatha, who held his small hot hands firmly, then glanced down with a world of baby appeal at Nurse Harvey.

She was not looking at him. She did not dare to look. She was having at that moment such a desperate fight with herself that she had scarcely time to give a thought to another human creature. She was determined not to faint; she bit

her lips to keep back the mortal weakness which was assailing her. Her heart thumped in her ears with great thuds of thunder; her eyes refused to see; cold perspiration broke out on her forehead.

Still guided by the physician's voice, which came dimly to her above the thunder of her beating heart, she held the bottle which was to save Tommy's life.

"I won't faint—no—no—it will soon be over. What good am I if I can't do this much, and for Tommy—for Tommy, whom I love! I always fainted before—when mother broke that blood vessel—when I heard that father was dead. No, no—I'm not going to faint this time. I *feel* just the same, but I won't, I'm determined I won't! What I dread is Tommy's cry when the doctor runs that awful bodkin into his little body. But perhaps I shan't hear it. My heart beats so loudly that perhaps it will drown Tommy's cry. Perhaps he has made his cry, and the pain is over. Oh, if I could but look! But I daren't, I daren't!"

"Hold the bottle a little higher up, Nurse," said the doctor. His voice was very stern. Nurse Harvey made a gigantic effort to obey him.

"Tommy's cry must be over," she said to herself. But it wasn't. It came like the sharp directness of lightning, dividing the thunderous sounds in her ears. Tommy's cry seemed, to Nurse Harvey, like the wail of a murdered child.

"How cruel and wicked you are to torture a baby like that!" she said, suddenly finding her voice, throwing down the bottle, rising to her feet, and confronting Dr. Digby with blazing eyes.

Tommy uttered another shriek, fainter and more anguished than the first, and the probationer lay in an unconscious heap on the floor by the side of the cot.

CHAPTER II.

LEFT HANDS AND THUMBS.

THERE were some whispered comments among the other nurses on the following morning when Nurse Harvey, with swollen eyelids and a deathly pale face, made her appearance at breakfast.

Nurse Harvey was not very popular at St. Christopher's.

The other probationers spoke of her as a proud miss, stuck up and haughty. They said she took airs on herself, and attached much importance to the fact that she was a lady by birth.

In 1870 lady nurses in our great hospitals were rather exceptions than rules. They were few and far between. When a lady did venture to offer herself to be trained as nurse in one of the hospitals, she had, in every way, a more severe ordeal to go through than her less refined sisters.

Twenty years ago it was not a recognized fact, as it is now, that highly strung nerves and a refined sensitive nature are often accompanied by the noblest courage, the readiest tact, the calmest exterior. It was supposed a good plan, so long ago as 1870, for nurses to be thoroughly trained, but to belong to the middle class. Doctors and patients both preferred the nurse who was not a lady by birth, and, in consequence, the girl who was gently born, and took this walk in life as her vocation, had, as a rule, a very bad time of it.

She had this bad time even if she was peculiarly fitted for her post, but when, as in Nurse Harvey's case, the nerves were not well under control and the courage was apt to disappear at the most critical juncture, it was scarcely likely that her life in a London hospital would be agreeable.

The incidents of the night before had leaked out, no one knew how. Sister Agatha had herself carried Nurse Harvey to her bedroom, and left her there to recover as best she could. No one had seen Sister Agatha toiling under her burden, still the news of Nurse Harvey's disgraceful want of courage, of her shameful, cowardly faint, of her abuse of the much adored house physician, and of the danger into which she had brought little Number Three in the children's ward, were all subjects of common talk.

The other probationers nudged each other when Nurse Harvey walked quietly into the breakfast room. They talked at her a good deal, and now and then giggled with a pleasing sense of their own superiority.

"Shouldn't I like to have been there, just!" said Nurse Elliot, a dumpling-faced girl, to her favorite friend, Nurse Fry. "Fancy being asked to help *him*!"

Nurse Fry laughed loudly.

"Perhaps Nurse Harvey was overpowered by the honor," she said. "Perhaps it was the honor of helping Dr. Digby that made her faint. Look at her now, as prim as you please,

eating her breakfast as if she could never move a muscle. Let's come up and ask her to give us a true version of the affair, Miss Elliot."

"No, no, I'm afraid. She's too 'aughty. Her above-you-all sort of airs are not my sort; I don't want to have anything to do with her."

Nurse Fry laughed contemptuously.

"Who's afraid?" she asked. "I for one want to learn the truth. Oh, would I be in Nurse Harvey's shoes when she catches it from Sister Agatha to-day!"

"She's almost certain to be reported to Sister Monica."

"*Almost* certain? Positive sure, you mean, Miss Elliot. Well, lady or not, I'm going to have a chat with her."

Nurse Fry danced up the room, and stood before Nurse Harvey, who was in the act of raising a cup of coffee to her almost colorless lips.

"Well, miss," she said.

"Well?" replied Miss Harvey. She raised her eyes, and looked fixedly and proudly at the other girl. Miss Fry stepped back a pace.

"I thought, Miss Harvey, you'd like to know about poor little Number Three upstairs. Poor little chap, he was never the strong sort, but I'd feel it if I were you. It was your faint did it. Wasn't that the case, Miss Elliot?"

"Hush!" said Nurse Elliot. She had followed her friend up the room, impelled by curiosity. Now she put her hand across Nurse Fry's mouth.

"Don't you see that the lady is going to faint again?" she said in a tone of genuine pity, wrung from her by the sight of Nurse Harvey's face. "She'll faint again," she repeated, "if you talk any more of your nonsense, Lucy Fry."

"No," said Cecilia Harvey. She rose suddenly from her seat at the table, pushed aside her cup of untasted coffee, and confronted several young nurses who had now clustered round her.

"I shall never faint as long as I live," she said. "I shall never, whatever happens, be weak enough for that act of folly. You need none of you be at all afraid to tell me the worst therefore—is Tommy Constantine dead?"

"Lor', miss," said a girl who had not yet spoken, "you're not a bit fit to be a nurse, taking on like that about a baby who hasn't been here a fortnight. Why, where would any of us

be if we fretted over the deaths? Deaths are all in the day's routine to nurses."

"Yes, yes, I am not fitted to be a nurse, I know, but please answer me. I—I love Tommy. He was a sweet baby. Is he dead?"

The nurses thus appealed to looked at one another. After a little hesitation, the greater number of them confessed that they did not know anything about Tommy. The circumstance of Nurse Harvey's fainting had aroused their interest, but they were none of them excited about a sick child with rheumatic fever. Such an event was much too common at St. Christopher's.

"I only said what I did as sort of a joke, miss," said Nurse Fry, "to take a rise out of you, Nurse Harvey."

"It was a cruel joke, and I think very little of you for uttering it," answered Cecilia, in her proudest, coldest tone.

She walked out of the breakfast room with her head erect, and a flush on her cheeks.

"Someone will tell me about Tommy when I go up to my ward," she remarked as she left the room.

She went very slowly upstairs, and, entering one of the women's wards, began to perform the menial duties which were expected of her at that early hour.

The sick women in their beds watched her admiringly.

"She 'ave a style of her own," said one to another. "Anyone, to look at her, would know that she has scarce washed a cup and saucer in her life. Aint it beautiful to see the unfamiliar ways of her?"

It gratified the sick women to notice Cecilia's awkwardness. They thought well of her for not being up to the work which they themselves could have performed so deftly. It added to their own importance to be waited on by this fine-looking but rather useless young lady. Cecilia, too, had other and far more valuable things to recommend her. Her face was not exactly beautiful, but its expression was wonderfully sweet. When these women suffered pain they liked to watch the color mounting into the young probationer's pale face, and the tears slowly dimming her eyes; they liked to feel the pressure of her white, beautifully shaped hands, and to hear the gentle voice say, emphatically:

"I am so sorry for you; I wish I could do anything to relieve you. I'd take your suffering and bear it myself, if it were possible."

These little speeches, and these simple actions, helped many a poor creature through a bad hour in the women's ward, but they did not turn Cecilia into a practical and useful nurse. Where genuine nursing was required Nurse Harvey was not to be relied on. The Sisters who had to train her were irritated by her ways twenty times in the course of every day. She was not thorough. She was not strong. She was all impulse (what was more irritating than an impulsive nurse?). She neglected her more obvious duties, and then rushed in and did the things which no one expected of her, and which no one wished her to perform.

This morning Nurse Harvey was in even less favor than usual. She broke one or two medicine glasses, only half used her duster over the articles of furniture, and, in short, was all left hands and all thumbs, as the irate Sister of the ward expressed it.

A sunken-faced old woman, who was lying in a bed not far from the door of the ward, beckoned to Cecilia to come and speak to her.

"Stoop down, my pretty," she whispered mysteriously; "stoop down, I want to say a word."

Nurse Harvey bent over her.

"You're low in yourself this morning, lovey, anyone can see that with half an eye. And you're more beautiful and awkward with the crockery even than usual. But never you mind that, love. We likes to see you awkward; it shows the high breedin'. Whisper, dearie. Couldn't *you* bring me my cup of tea this morning? Couldn't you now, love? And you might put a pinch more in the pot if you could do it unbeknownst. I had a bad night, nurse, dear, and——"

A shrill voice called Nurse Harvey's name.

"I'll do what I can for you," she said to her old friend, as she hurried off.

She walked down the ward. Another woman a patient creature with a long face which expressed great suffering, called her name.

"Nurse Harvey, do come to me a moment, my dear."

Cecilia forgot the voice of command to obey the voice of suffering. This was in perfect accordance with her complex character.

"Yes," she said, going up to the woman. "Can I do anything for you? Are you better this morning, Mrs. Murray?"

"Worse, my darling, much worse. But it don't matter.

I've had a vision in the night, and I'm going home to *Him*. The Lord's coming to fetch me."

Cecilia's eyes shone with a bright light.

"It will be very nice for you to be in heaven," she said, after a short pause.

"Nice, darling! Ah, little you can tell of the niceness! I haven't been out of pain day or night for three months, and before that I had hunger to bear, and cold to bear, and cruel words, and—and—but I won't say no more. My husband is living, Miss Harvey, he'll hear of my death, and I want you—oh, my dear young thing—I want you to——"

"Nurse Harvey, you're wanted this moment; Sister Monica has sent for you." Another probationer came up and gave this message eagerly.

"Say I will come presently," answered Cecilia in a calm voice.

She knelt down by the dying woman's bed-side, and her untidily secured cap again fell off her bright head.

"What am I to say to your husband?" she asked, bringing her face close to the woman's.

"My darling, oh, if you would take him a message it would lift such a load off my heart! He's not all bad, as some folks say. It was trouble as changed him; he was a very good man once. There was me and there was 'im, and there were two little 'uns, and we was 'appy as could be. But then came trouble, and the little 'uns was took away, thank the good Lord! I blessed Him for taking 'em away when I kissed 'em in their little coffins, but Peter took it 'ard, and everything went wrong. But he's not a bad man at bottom; and I want you, Nurse Harvey, to promise me faithful that you'll see him when he comes out."

"Comes out?" said Cecilia, in a voice of interrogation.

"Let me whisper, dear. I don't want Ann Sutton in the next bed to hear us. Peter is *serving his time*, but he'll be out—he'll be out again on the 30th of May. You try and meet him, Miss Harvey, and tell him——"

A hand touched the probationer on the shoulder. She looked up with a start, rose to her feet, blushed violently, and felt for her neglected cap.

"Will you come with me, Nurse, at once?" said the stern voice of Sister Agatha. "Sister Monica has twice sent for you. She wishes to speak to you in her private room."

"In one moment," said Cecilia. She turned back to the

woman, bent down and gave her a kiss. "Good-by," she said; "I won't forget."

"Good Lord," said the poor woman, turning round and looking in a dazed way at her neighbor in the next bed. "I haven't given her any message. She don't know where he is, and if she did know she wouldn't know what to say to him. Oh, good Lord!"

"That's all what comes of whispering," snapped back the jealous neighbor. "Whisperings, and favoritings, and making much of young ladies as has no call to be nurses. Nurse Jones, have the goodness to hand me that towel, my dear. Thank you. Well, Mrs. Murray, I'm sorry you're disappointed in young miss, but I don't 'old with letting out family secrets to strangers. I keeps myself to myself."

Mrs. Murray turned her dying eyes, and looked sadly at her cranky neighbor.

"It don't matter," she said. "*He* knows—He what came to me in a vision last night knows well, and He'll break it gentle to Peter. Oh, aint I glad the babies was tuck home first. They's escaped a deal; it's a weary world, and the pore lambs is well quit of it."

Nurse Harvey followed Sister Agatha in a dream. The other probationers looked spitefully at her as she walked out of the ward. They none of them ever saw her again.

When the nurse and the young probationer reached the corridor, Sister Agatha turned and faced the tall girl who walked by her side.

"Do you know what I think of your conduct?"

Cecilia's sweet eyes opened a shade wider. Her tremulous lips grew firm, and a touch of pride was discernible in the way she said:

"No, Sister Agatha, I cannot read your thoughts."

"You will know them fast enough after I have expressed them. I think you are an insolent girl, absolutely unsuited to the profession you have taken up. I have found it my duty to report you to Sister Monica, and you may expect to be severely reprimanded."

"Do you mind telling me how little Tommy is this morning?"

"Number Three is my patient; you have nothing to do with him. I refuse to give you any particulars with regard to his condition."

"I only want to know one thing. Did I—did I make him worse last night?"

"I do not object to telling you that you made him considerably worse. Anything further I refuse to reveal."

"Sister Agatha, tell me, at least, that he is not dead."

"I will tell you nothing. That is Sister Monica's door to your left, down those steps. She has waited for you too long already. Go to her at once."

Sister Agatha turned away, and Cecilia knocked at the door of the Lady Superintendent's private sitting room. Nurse Harvey had been a month at St. Christopher's, but she had scarcely exchanged a dozen words with the Matron, Sister Monica, who, as Head Nurse of the whole vast hospital, was looked up to with reverence by nurses and probationers alike.

Sister Monica was seated at a large desk, busily writing. When Cecilia's modest knock was heard she raised her head, said "Come in" in a firm, clear voice, and again bent forward to resume her occupation.

The door was opened, and the slim young probationer, who was in such deep disgrace, advanced a pace or two into the room.

The girl nurses at St. Christopher's were fond of going into raptures. There were certain people in the hospital whom it was the fashion to adore—one was the house physician, Dr. Digby; the other the Matron, or Lady Superintendent, Sister Monica.

Cecilia had made herself disliked by never joining in the buzz of admiration which followed the ways and doings of this pair.

She was a dreamer, and her dreams had never led her in their direction. She had been unmoved when Sister Monica said a few kind words to her on her first arrival, and, bewildered by the constant coming and going of new faces at all hours and all seasons, scarcely remembered that of the lady before whom she now stood in disgrace.

Sister Monica heard the door open, but for a moment or two did not look up.

Cecilia had time to bestow upon her a fixed and earnest gaze. She did so, and her heart leaped with pleasure.

"Sister Monica is a lady," she whispered to herself; "I shall feel at home with her. She will understand me—how thankful I am!"

She clasped her hands nervously together, but the color

came back slowly to her white cheeks, and when at last Sister Monica looked at her in grave displeasure, she saw a childish face of great sweetness, a young and shrinking figure, two lips that quivered, two eyes that shone through tears.

"I have sent for you——" began Sister Monica. She stopped suddenly, struck dumb by the look of appeal and distress. Cecilia's soul looked out of her eyes.

Sister Monica rose, came over to her, took her hand, and led her to a sofa.

"Sit down by me, my dear—I can give you a few minutes. What is your name?"

"Cecilia Harvey."

"How long have you been here?"

"Only a month."

"Who are your parents?"

"My parents are dead."

"Who *were* your parents?"

"My father was a gentleman, my mother a lady. If you have only a few minutes to spare, I shall waste your time if I tell you anything more about them."

Sister Monica started. She was not accustomed to the tone which the probationer used. She was so completely queen in her own kingdom that to have her lightest order questioned gave her a queer experience.

"You have a bold spirit, Cecilia Harvey," she said, "and," after a pause, "you are right. My duties are limited, my time is precious. I have to extend wide sympathies. In the twenty-four hours my sympathy has to go round a vast circle, and if you prefer to remain outside it I must abide by your decision."

"I did not mean to be rude," replied Cecilia. "I thought you really had no time to give me."

"Nor have I. Now to business. Sister Agatha told me of your breach of discipline last night."

"My breach of discipline? I comforted a little child in great suffering. Was that wrong?"

"Very wrong if you broke a rule. You had nothing to do with Sister Agatha's ward, and you were not on night duty. You should have been in bed and asleep at the hour when you fainted by Tommy Constantine's bed."

Cecilia began to sob.

"If you had seen his face, if you had heard his piercing

cry, and if when you came he grew peaceful and happy, could you have remained outside?"

"I should not be where I am now if I could not have restrained myself to that extent."

"Then I hate—I *hate* being a hospital nurse!"

"My dear, I have sent for you to say that I do not consider you in any way fitted for the life. Sister Bride, whose ward you are in, says that you are impulsive, not methodical; hasty, not calm; careless in little things. These are all faults, my dear, which time might or might not remedy. But the cardinal sin of disobedience renders your career as a hospital nurse at an end. I shall advise you to send in your resignation as quickly as possible."

Sister Monica rose from the sofa. She hesitated for an instant, then held out her hand. Cecilia's limp fingers just touched hers.

"Good-by," said the Lady Superintendent. "If I can help you in any other capacity I shall be glad to do so."

CHAPTER III.

WITH THE OUT-PATIENTS.

WHEN Cecilia Harvey found herself outside the Lady Superintendent's room, she locked her hands tightly together, and stood for a moment in a dazed attitude.

The blow which Sister Monica had given her had been very sudden and unexpected. Its first effect was to produce a slight paralysis both of thought and movement. Cecilia found herself incapable of realizing what had happened. She was equally incapable of moving in any direction.

"What shall I do?" she murmured, vaguely. She was neither angry nor sorry at that moment. She was simply stunned.

Her work was waiting for her in the woman's ward. She forgot all about her work.

A shock of another order was necessary to arouse her out of her present almost helpless condition. It came quickly.

A nurse, an experienced and active woman, ran with flying steps down the long corridor. She saw the probationer standing outside Sister Monica's closed door. The nurse wanted to see Sister Monica on a matter of urgent importance.

Cecilia was in her way, and with a movement of her arm she pushed her aside.

"Stand back," she said; "I want to see Sister Monica at once, and you are in the way of the door. Stand back, please."

Cecilia started, and a rosy flood of color came into her face.

That changeable face of hers was always capable of this sudden brief loveliness. Even the commonplace nurse was arrested by the complete change on the probationer's face. She stopped to examine her more critically.

"You are Nurse Harvey," she said, "the girl who made such a mess of it last night. I wouldn't be in your shoes for a good deal."

"I don't think you would," said Cecilia, slowly; "I have just been dismissed. I haven't a penny in the world, and my career is over." She stopped suddenly, with a look of hot distress and shame. "Please forget what I said," she implored eagerly, "I mean about having no money. *That* part doesn't matter. Please, please tell me how Tommy Constantine is now!"

The older nurse stared hard at the trembling questioner.

"Don't you know?" she asked, with a brief little touch of pity in her voice. "Oh, Miss Harvey, what is the use of young ladies coming to places like this? What possible good can they do? When all's said and done it's a rough life, and young ladies aint fitted for it. I'm really sorry for you, Miss Harvey."

"Please don't mind that. How is Tommy Constantine?"

"Little Number Three! Very ill—in the greatest possible danger—may last an hour or two longer, but it is impossible to say."

"Nurse, do you think *I* injured him last night?"

"Do I think it? What are you made of, Miss Harvey? Have you got the ordinary amount of brains, or are you deficient? Is it likely that a child suffering from rheumatic fever and pericarditis would not be injured when the needle which was to save his life had to be twice inserted?"

"Twice? What do you mean?"

"When you fainted, you gave the bottle a jerk, and the needle was pulled out of the child's body. The doctor had to insert it again."

"Oh, what a wicked girl I am!" said Cecilia, suddenly. She did not ask the nurse any more questions. She walked

very quickly down the corridor, all life and action now, her paralysis of movement and feeling effectually banished.

Cecilia's eyes were so bright, and her cheeks had such a lovely flush on them, that a young medical student stopped to look at her with a broad stare of admiration. She did not take in the meaning of his glance, but she paused to ask him a question.

"Can you tell me where Dr. Digby is?"

The youth half laughed as he replied:

"You must be quite a new comer, Nurse," he said. "Dr. Digby is always busy with the out-patients at this hour of the morning."

"Thank you; where are the out-patients attended to?"

"Don't you know, really? Run down those stairs and turn to your left. The out-patients are in the new wing. Knock at the door marked 5. But, I say, you'd better not disturb the doctor unless it's a matter of vital importance."

"It is of vital importance," answered Cecilia.

She ran off, soon discovered the new wing, and found herself standing outside the door numbered 5. She knew nothing of the ways of the out-patients, and paused to consider for a moment while her timid knock at the ponderous door remained unanswered.

After a very brief hesitation she opened the door and went in. She found herself at once in a large general waiting room which was half full of a motley group of men, women, and children, all waiting their turns to enter the different consulting rooms.

Seeing Cecilia in her nurse's dress they instantly made way for her. She walked quickly through the room, opened another door and entered one of the rooms set apart for women and children. Several medical students were busy here talking to the patients, and giving advice to the best of their ability. The out-patients who had never come before were asked to stand aside to consult with Dr. Digby, but most of the older patients were briefly questioned, and dismissed with the invariable remark:

"Continue the treatment until I see you again."

There was much buzzing and talking in the room, and the frequent shuffling of feet and the impatient querulous movements of the out-patients added to the sense of confusion.

When he saw Cecilia standing conspicuous and a little apart

from everyone else, one of the youngest of the medical clerks got up and came to speak to her.

"Do you want anything, Nurse?"

"Yes," she answered, "I want to see Dr. Digby at once. It is most pressing."

"He is engaged with the out-patients in the consulting room."

"It is most pressing," repeated Cecilia, in a voice of agitation.

The young clerk stared rather, then he turned to one of his fellow-students, moved away a pace and whispered something. In a moment he came back.

"Stand here, please, Nurse. When the doctor has done with the patient he is now talking to, I'll ask him to see you."

Cecilia moved to the corner indicated.

She had not to wait long. In a very brief time the door of the inner room was opened, and an old man with a bowed form and a long gray beard came out. The clerk who had spoken to Cecilia went into the consulting room, to reappear instantly, and nod to the nurse to follow him.

"Dr. Digby can give you two minutes," he whispered, then he added, as if impelled to say something by the look on Cecilia's face:

"You had better be very brief; the doctor hates to be interrupted when he is engaged with his patients."

Cecilia bowed in response to the young man's admonition. She walked quickly into the room.

The house physician was bending over some papers. When he heard the nurse's light footfall, he looked up with that brief smile which was habitual to him. He was a brusque man, but that smile of his redeemed many of his harsh words. When he saw Cecilia, however, a curious change came over his face—the smile vanished, the expression grew annoyed, even angry.

Dr. Digby's tone was of the curtest:

"Do you want me, Nurse Harvey? I am particularly engaged."

"I want to speak to you, Dr. Digby."

"Have you anything to tell me in connection with the hospital?"

"No; it is something about myself."

The doctor raised his brows, he was about to say:

"I cannot attend to you now, you must come to me this

evening," when something in the forlorn expression of the probationer's face arrested his impatient words, and aroused in him a curious and unexpected sense of pity. He glanced at the clinical clerk, who was sitting at the desk in a distant part of the room.

"Do you want to see me alone?" he asked, looking briefly at Cecilia.

"I do," she said, "I won't keep you long."

"Leave us for a moment or two, Everard," said the doctor, addressing his clerk.

The young man instantly went away, closing the door of the consulting room behind him.

"Now, Nurse," said the doctor, "you must say what you have come to say in a very few words; my patients are waiting for me."

"I want you to forgive me for what I did last night."

"Yes, yes," the impatient look came back once more to the physician's face. "I never met a more consistent character," he said, looking full at Miss Harvey; "girls like you always ask for pardon when they have committed mischief which cannot be put right."

"Will you forgive me?" she repeated, staring at him.

"Yes," he replied with a slow smile, "but I shall never ask you to render me assistance in a critical operation again."

"You won't have to," she said gently; "Sister Monica has just told me that I am unfit for my post. She says I am to go."

"Sister Monica is right, you are not fit to be a hospital nurse. It is better for you to seek some other employment."

"In the meantime I have no money——" said Cecilia.

"Oh!" The doctor looked at her in puzzled wonder; he had hitherto thought her too much of a lady to allude to a subject which might lead to an offer of pecuniary help.

"And," continued Cecilia, "I have no home."

"I am sorry for that——" began the doctor.

She stopped him impatiently.

"I do not say these things to ask you in any way to help me," she said. "I am penniless and homeless, and to be suddenly dismissed because I showed, in the first instance, pity for a suffering child, in the second instance, the weakness of inexperience, seems a little hard. But I don't want you to intercede for me."

"What do you want?" asked the doctor, with impatience which he could scarcely conceal.

"I want to know exactly how Tommy Constantine is. I want to hear from your lips if there is any chance of his life being spared, for if my act of folly and weakness last night has killed him I shall lose my senses."

The doctor rose suddenly from his seat.

"Sit down," he said, in an authoritative voice, "you are very hysterical, and, therefore, not responsible for your exaggerated words. I am going to write a prescription for you. When you have taken what I order you will probably be better."

"Thank you, perhaps I shall. In the meantime will you answer my question? Is Tommy Constantine going to die?"

"I trust not. He is very ill, but children as ill have recovered. There is no doubt that, in the very critical state of his health last night your action weakened him and lessened the chance of cure. He was in danger then, he is still in danger, but he may live. I do not regard the case as hopeless. Now, I am afraid I must ask you to leave me."

"Thank you, Dr. Digby." Cecilia paused a moment. "Good-by," she added, "I shall have left this place in an hour."

She looked very youthful and childish as she said these last words, and once again the rose tint, which made her beautiful, suffused her face and brow.

The doctor could not help looking at her with a new interest. At that moment she ceased to be only a nurse, and took her place as a woman in his sympathies.

He had very broad sympathies. Beneath all his brusquery was a chivalrous nature. He felt sorry for the girl who was penniless and homeless.

"Where are you going?" he asked, holding out his hand. "Have you any plans for yourself when you leave here?"

"I have a relative who will take me in for a day or two. I shall go to her at first," answered Cecilia.

"Are not your parents living?"

"No," her eyes filled with sudden tears.

"I am sorry for you," said Dr. Digby, "I wish it was in my power to help you, but please believe in my sympathy. Take it for what it is worth."

"Thank you," answered Cecilia. "It is very good of you to speak kindly to me after I have given you so much trouble and annoyance."

"We will let bygones be bygones," he said, smiling now full upon her. "You are not suited for a nurse, but there is a call-

ing in life waiting for you to fill. I do not know what it is, but I know it is there. Take courage, do not let despair enter into your soul. You are young, and you have a tender heart. Good-by."

"Good-by," said Cecilia.

She had nearly reached the door when she turned and, once more guided by her irrepressible impulses, came up to the doctor.

"I must know about Tommy Constantine," she said. "The nurses won't tell me. They are full of prejudice. They are all rule, and they make no allowance for one like me. The narrowness, the proprieties, the detestable routine, are all in all to them. If I ask them a question which is life or death to me, they won't reply if they think it breaks a rule. Do you suppose I can go away from this hospital and rest content not to know whether I have been the cause of a child's death or not? How am I to learn, when I leave St. Christopher's, about Tommy Constantine?"

"You are keeping me from my patients in a most unwarrantable way, Miss Harvey," said the doctor; but though he spoke brusquely, his eyes were full of kindness as he looked at her.

Cecilia answered the eyes, not the voice.

"I won't keep you another moment," she said, "only tell me how I am to hear about the child."

Dr. Digby took out his watch.

"Come to my private room this evening," he said, "anyone will tell you the part of the hospital where I live. I can see you for ten minutes after dinner. About nine o'clock. Good-by."

He held out his big hand, clasped Cecilia's, then called to his medical clerk to return.

"Show in another patient, Everard," he said. "Good-by, Miss Harvey."

Cecilia left the room.

CHAPTER IV.

A WILLING SCAPEGOAT.

IN a part of London which has more or less gone out of fashion in these days there was, at the time when Cecilia Harvey's real story began, an old-fashioned house in an old-

world square. In this house lived the relative who was to take pity on the penniless and homeless probationer.

She was a widow of the name of Lancaster. She had three daughters and two sons.

Mrs. Lancaster was known to be possessed of what is called in certain circles a moderate income. There is no more elastic term than this. For one man's moderation is another man's wealth; on the other hand, one man's moderation may be considered a pittance to starve on by his brother.

Mrs. Lancaster belonged to the class of people who considered a thousand a year to be an exact fulfillment of the prayer of Agar. She was often heard to say:

"I thank the good God, who has given me neither poverty nor riches."

She was an excellent manager, and made the £250 which she received quarterly go a long way. She educated her children on it, kept up her house, entertained a select circle of friends, and took a summer holiday, which was not considered so absolutely indispensable in 1870 as it is in 1892.

Mrs. Lancaster gave a certain amount of her wordly goods to feed the poor. She would have considered it very wrong to withhold this sum from the needy and wanting. She liked to see her name figure in subscription lists. She was fond of bestowing her patronage on bazaars and charity-concerts. The clergyman of the parish in which she lived considered her an excellent woman. His wife was fond of appealing to her for advice, and his district visitors knew well that Mrs. Lancaster's opinion on this and that matter relating to parochial affairs was quite as valuable as the vicar's own.

This excellent woman, who had never been a penny in debt in her life, who had brought up her five children with prudence and rectitude, had the misfortune to be aunt by marriage to Cecilia Harvey.

Cecilia had been a thorn in the excellent creature's side from the time when, eight years old, she had been sent home from India under the care of her mother.

Mrs. Harvey was as like her rather willful child as a mother can be like a daughter.

It is the ordinary custom to say that children resemble their parents, but in this case the common mode of speech would not express the resemblance between Mrs. Harvey and her daughter. The mother had the daughter's impulse, only more so—she possessed the daughter's weakness in an exaggerated

form. The girl's latent strength, her fire, her enthusiasm, were only shadowed forth in the mother. Mrs. Harvey had only the germs of that originality which was to mark Cecilia by and by.

She was weakly in constitution, and when Cecilia was twelve years old she died.

Mrs. Harvey died in the Lancasters' house. She was not unkindly treated; she had a good doctor and an excellent nurse to attend her in her last moments, and Mrs. Lancaster herself was standing by her side when she breathed her last.

But it was not on Mrs. Lancaster that the dying woman bestowed her long last passionate glance. It was rather on the slim child whose little face was glowing with suppressed feeling, whose gray eyes were tearless, and whose small hot hand was secretly pressing her mother's under the bedclothes.

After Mrs. Harvey's death Cecilia was found in one of those strange faints which came to her more than once in her early life. She got over the unconscious stage early enough, but afterward she was feverish, and for a long time her listlessness, her apathy toward pleasure and pain alike, the indifferent manner in which she met both caresses and repulses, made her an object of irritation to all around her.

Cecilia's father had been a captain in one of the Line regiments. His widow had a small pension, which ceased, of course, at her death. Cecilia was also allowed a few pounds by the government. Mrs. Lancaster said it was scarcely worth mentioning; but, being a managing woman, she made it pay for her niece's education.

Mrs. Lancaster decreed that such a temperament as Cecilia's was likely to produce an unhealthy effect in her home. She sought and found a cheap school for the child, and sent her there when she most needed the tenderness and affection of a happy home.

Cecilia was underfed in the school, and all her hysterical tendencies became intensified. She returned to Harford Square when she was seventeen. She was supposed to be finished—that was the correct term in her young days—but an absolutely less developed creature has seldom walked the earth.

In figure she was tall and painfully thin. She had lovely hair, but not a large supply of it; it was bright in color, and she could arrange it gracefully round her head. Her eyes had plenty of expression in them, but they were neither specially

large nor specially dark. The rest of her features were commonplace, except her mouth, which was full of sweetness, petulance, and spirit. Cecilia expressed more by the curves of her finely cut lips than by her eyes. They revealed a thousand times a day the unruly, angry, and yet deeply earnest and affectionate spirit which dwelt in her breast.

When she came back from school her aunt told her she had now done her part for her, and that in future she must earn her living as a governess.

"You have had immense advantages, Cecilia," said Mrs. Lancaster. "You are a highly finished girl, and awkward as you still are, I will say this for you, you always *look* like a lady."

"I can't help looking like what I am," replied Cecilia.

"Don't interrupt me, my dear, that is very bad style."

Cecilia folded her hands with an impatient sigh.

"It is impossible for me to keep you at home any longer, my dear girl."

"At home," echoed Cecilia. She threw some scorn into her words. Then she added in an exasperatingly meek voice, "I know perfectly well that you have no room for me in this house, Aunt Charlotte."

"It isn't a question of room," said Mrs. Lancaster, flushing; "it is a question of far deeper import. Is it right for a young girl to be dependent or independent?"

"Dear me, Aunt Charlotte," responded Cecilia, springing to her feet, "why discuss a question which is already answered? The girl who is called Cecilia Harvey will certainly never be dependent on anyone."

"That is right, my love. I knew you had plenty of spirit, Cecil. After all I am only your aunt by marriage, and my means are limited. I have often great difficulty in making two ends meet."

"I am sure you have, Aunt Charlotte. There is quite a little gap between the two ends when I am in the house, isn't there?"

"Cecilia, your pertness is one of your faults. Well, my love, as I said just now, you are finished."

"How, Aunt? In what am I finished?"

Mrs. Lancaster felt a little taken aback.

"How are you finished?" she repeated. "You had better ask your late governess, Madame Letouche. It is a strange remark for a girl just fresh from school to make. Your music, for instance?"

"I always play wrong notes."

"You ought to be ashamed to confess it. Your singing?"

"My voice is flat, thin, and out of tune."

"Well, Cecilia, if you are determined to make the worst of yourself——"

"Not at all; only why will you say that I am finished?"

"So you are, my dear, you have had a really nice education. Your French, for instance?"

"Aunt Charlotte, I must confess a secret to you. I can't talk French; I can't even read it properly. I *hate* French!"

"You say this——"

"Because it is true."

"Then what did you go to school for?"

"Because you sent me. It was a horrid school; they taught nothing properly there, and I was half starved."

"Cecilia, you have no right to say such things."

"They are true, Aunt Charlotte. I should not be the ugly, scraggy creature I am to-day if I had not been hungry more or less—and it was always more and never less—from the time I was twelve and a half until I came back to your house a month ago. They never taught anything properly at my school. How could the teachers teach what they did not know themselves? I was fond of drawing and natural history and—and—zoölogy."

"What in the world is that, my dear?"

Cecilia smiled in a superior way.

"Never mind," she said, in a gentle but most irritating manner. "Zoölogy is never counted in a finished education, so even if I knew anything about it, and I don't say I do—I wish I did—it would not help me to get a good situation as governess. So, Aunt Charlotte, I may as well say briefly at once that I don't intend to be a governess."

"You don't intend to be a governess? Really, Cecilia, your manner and your speech are too trying! Can a penniless girl choose?"

"This one can."

"Cecilia, you are a very wicked, ungrateful young person."

"I am sorry you think so, Aunt Charlotte; but I don't intend to be a governess. I can't teach, and I should hate the life."

"Then you prefer being dependent on a lady who is really no relation to you?"

"I shan't be dependent on you, Aunt Charlotte,"

"Pray, may I ask what you intend to do?"

"I can't tell you just this minute. Perhaps I shall go into a shop."

"Oh, oh, and bring disgrace on us all!"

Cecilia walked out of the room. She was undoubtedly a most irritating girl, and Mrs. Lancaster felt that she had every reason to be aggrieved.

She was determined not to allow her niece to become an inmate of her home. She knew that this headstrong girl was the very last person to accommodate herself to circumstances. Circumstances in Cecilia's case would have meant being the Cinderella of the household. By no possible means could Miss Harvey have been induced to accept this *rôle*; therefore she must go.

She must and should earn her own living.

On the day of her conversation with her aunt, Cecilia went for a walk. She was fond of going out alone, and as she was so awkward and so plain, this was the opinion of the Lancaster household, no one thought of preventing her from taking the exercise she chose in her own fashion and at her own time.

Cecilia took a long walk this afternoon. There were burning thoughts in her heart, and she wanted to get rid of them by quick, free exercise. She would have liked to ride a fleet horse at that moment, had such been within her reach. Cecilia was the kind of woman to ride like the wind. She could not ride, the means being denied her, but, at least, she could walk. She quickly reached Regent's Park, and then, indeed, she put forth her strength, and seemed to skim over the ground.

The exercise did her good, and she went back to Harford Square warm and glowing in body, and with a more temperate feeling in her aggrieved heart.

From Regent's Park there were two ways to reach Harford Square. One lay down respectable and gloomy Gower Street, the other, and the shorter way, passed through some slums of a rather shady character. Cecilia, reckless in everything, chose the slums. She walked down them, indifferent to the fact that more than one person turned to stare at her. She was certainly not at all beautiful at this time, but her hair was wonderfully bright, and her young figure even now gave promise of grace. She held herself erect, too, and walked with a free motion. The people in the slums, men and women alike, stared at the proud-looking girl. Cecilia saw nothing of this. She quickly, however, saw something else—the sight

woke her up, she forgot her day-dreams, her own sorrows, real and imaginary; her eyes grew full of grave and tender pity; she stopped short.

The sight which affected her was the following.

A little girl dressed in rags was carrying a jug of beer. The jug was large and full to the brim. The child carried it with much care, but the day was a cold one, there was ice on the ground, the badly shod feet slipped, the thin blue hands relaxed their hold of the jug—it fell to the ground, shivered to a thousand bits. There was a pool of beer round the broken jug, and the child threw herself on the ground close to the pool and the broken fragments, and sobbed in a low, heart-broken manner.

Cecilia flew to her and picked her up.

“Don’t cry,” she said, “it was an accident. I saw how cold your hands were, and your feet were so badly shod. Who could walk on a slippery pavement in such boots as yours? Don’t cry, little girl, you could not help spilling the beer.”

“Dad ’ull beat me,” said the child, rubbing a dirty knuckle into a watery blue eye; “’ee beats us orfe. Yer wouldn’t like it, ef yer was me.”

“Your father won’t beat you for an accident. Tell him you broke the jug because you slipped, and because he doesn’t give you good boots.”

“No, I won’t,” said the child, “’ee wouldn’t care—ee’d beat me cos ’ee wants ’is beer for dinner.”

Cecilia stood motionless, deeply thinking.

A little crowd gathered round her, waiting for the obvious thing for the young lady to do. Of course she was expected to put her hand into her pocket and draw out her purse and give the child the wherewithal to buy a fresh jug, and then more money to fill it with beer. Cecilia, however, had no purse in her pocket.

Seeing her hesitation, a dirty woman nudged her on her elbow, and remarked:

“Little Peg’s right, laidy, the father’s real ’ard. He’ll beat ’er orfe. You could get a jug like the one she’s broke for twopence round the corner.”

“I have not got twopence,” said Cecilia. “If the child must have a new jug of beer to bring home, I cannot help her. I am very, very sorry.”

Peg’s blue eyes had grown dry by this time. When Cecilia began to speak they were raised to her face in eager

expectation, by the time she had finished the lids had dropped over them, and tears once more welled forth.

"I tell you what," said Cecilia briskly, "I'll come home with you, Peg, and speak to your father about the accident. I have no money with me, I wish I had, but I will see that you are not beaten. If your father must beat anyone he shall beat me. I am stronger than you. Come along, Peg."

She took the child's little cold hand and walked away with her, the greater number of the crowd of people that had collected round this little street scene gazing at her retreating form in astonishment, and a few stragglers running down the street after her and the child. They reached a court which even policemen feared to enter, but Cecilia, in her ignorance, knew no sinking of heart—she was elated with the hope that she might save the shrinking little Peg from cruel blows.

The child and the girl got well inside the court—then the child made an heroic effort.

"Kind laidy," she said, "yer'd better go now; this aint the place for the likes of you."

Cecilia laughed.

"Nonsense," she said, "you live here, Peg, and I suppose I can endure this horrible place for a few minutes to save you from a beating. O Peg! it *is* a horrible place—how can you endure it? But never mind, come quickly and take me to your father."

The shadow of a smile flitted over Peg's queer wizened old-young face—her tiny clawlike hand gave Cecilia's a fond squeeze. When Peg gave that squeeze, love for the first time was born in her soul.

She said nothing further to dissuade her friend, but ran across the court holding her hand, and, entering a house out of which queer and awful noises issued, went down some steps that led to a cellar, and pushed open the door.

"Yere we be," she said, panting a little.

For a moment Cecilia could see nothing—then, as she grew accustomed to the horrible twilight of the place, she noticed that a gaunt man, only half clothed, rose from a cobbler's stool, and came two or three steps forward to stare at her out of his bloodshot eyes. A woman also stood up, and two children stopped quarreling, to gaze at the apparition which so unexpectedly turned their den into a place of wonder.

Cecilia saw the man, woman, and children; at the same moment she was greeted with a horrible and sickly smell.

The smell turned her sick, and a terror of fainting began to assail her.

"I have come," she said hastily, "to tell you that Peg fell in the street and broke the jug of beer that she was carrying. The jug and the beer are both gone. Peg slipped because the jug was too heavy for her, and because her boots are broken. She was not in the least to blame, and I said I would come here to ask you not to beat her."

Cecilia addressed all her words to the man, who now came close to her and leered wickedly into her face. He was too much astonished to speak for a moment.

"You give us the price of the jug, laidy," said the woman, in a shrill tone. Cecilia was still looking at the man. "I have not got the money," she said "or I would gladly pay for the beer—I have not a penny in the world about me—I wish I had, if it would save Peg from a beating."

The man suddenly found his voice—it came to him in the shape of a harsh rude laugh. Then he said suddenly:

"Peg knows as I allers beats her when she spills the beer. Come along, Peg, yere's the switch 'andy."

Cecilia suddenly threw her arm around the child.

"You shan't do it!" she said, her eyes flashing, "I don't suppose you would dare to beat a lady, but you shall beat me before you beat this little girl!"

"Oh, wouldn't I dare!" said the man.

"All right—begin!"

Cecilia pulled her glove off, bared her arm, and stretched it out.

"Here," she said, "strike! I have no money to give to Peg, but I can take her punishment."

So white a hand and arm had never been seen by that man before. In the dim light the slender fingers looked almost spiritual. The monster stepped across the cellar to take a switch from the wall, but before he could even turn to strike Cecilia's offered hand the woman interfered.

"You forgive him, laidy," she said, "'ee wouldn't strike you, laidy; w'y should 'ee? Only 'ee wanted 'is beer, and Peg angered him. Maybe, laidy, you'd give us that tie round yer neck."

"And that ring on yer finger," suddenly said the man.

Cecilia instantly pulled her white handkerchief off.

"You can have that," she said, "but not the ring, for it belonged to my mother."

The woman seized the handkerchief, which was large and white and made of the finest silk.

"If you pawn this hankerchief," said Cecilia, "you will get the price of the jug and the price of more beer than will fill it. Good-by, Peg."

She stooped down, touched the child's grimy forehead with her lips, turned and walked out of the cellar, and the next moment was beyond the court.

Her movements were so fleet that no one had intercepted her. She walked straight home, completely taken out of herself.

"Aunt Charlotte," she said that night, "I have found my vocation."

Mrs. Lancaster raised her eyes and looked at her interrogatively.

"If you are going to talk sense, I will listen to you, Cecilia," she said; "if not, I am busy."

"I am going to talk a great deal of sense, Aunt Charlotte. I will not be a governess, but I can make myself independent of you and your house. I wish to become a nurse in a hospital. I should prefer a children's hospital, as I like children better than grown people—but, at any rate, I intend to become a nurse."

When Cecilia made this remark Mrs. Lancaster raised her eyes, and surveyed her niece from head to foot. She kept her lips firmly shut, but her eyes spoke volumes.

After a very long pause, she said in the tone one uses to a refractory child:

"I had a drive with Mrs. Pickering-Clark this afternoon. I told her about you, and she said it was possible you might suit her for her two little girls. They are young—the eldest twelve, the youngest nine. The Pickering-Clarks are a sweet family, evangelical in their tendencies. You will be most fortunate if you secure a home in their house, and I have told Mrs. Pickering-Clark that you will call there to-morrow at ten o'clock."

"You had better write to her, Aunt Charlotte, to cancel the engagement you have made for me. I shall *not* call on Mrs. Pickering-Clark, and I shall *not* teach her daughters. That sweet Christian household would not suit me at all. I intend to be a nurse in a hospital."

Cecilia again ran out of the room. There was an attic, which she called her own, at the top of the house. She was

flying up to it now when she met her cousin, George Lancaster, coming down. He was a heavy-eyed young man of about two-and-twenty. When he saw Cecilia he held out his arms playfully, to bar her progress.

"Well, Humpty-Dumpty," he said. This was his favorite name for his cousin. It annoyed her a good deal. She colored high now.

"I am not Humpty-Dumpty," she said. "Let me pass, if you please."

"Not until you tell me where you are a-going. Come now, Dumpty, you need not be in such a pepper. You know I'm your friend."

Cecilia stepped back and dropped a profound courtesy.

"How you elate me!" she said, mockingly. "Your words make my spirits soar."

"You need not be satirical, Cecil. Where are you going?"

"To my attic."

"To freeze there?"

"No; to go to bed, sleep, and be happy."

"Come back, and have a game of bezique in the drawing room with me."

"Thank you, I prefer not."

George looked behind him, then he peeped over the banisters. No one was coming downstairs, and no one was coming up. Cecilia's cheeks flushed when she spoke, and her eyes shone.

George came nearer.

"Do you know that you are a very pretty girl?" he said.

"I know that I am not, and I know also that, even if I was, you have no right to say so. If you tell me again that I am pretty to my face I shall repeat your words to Aunt Charlotte."

With an adroit movement she ducked under his extended arms, and soon found refuge in her attic.

That night the excitable, childish impulsive girl cried herself to sleep.

CHAPTER V.

THE RETURN OF THE BAD PENNY.

MRS. LANCASTER was supposed to have a strong will, but Cecilia's was stronger. Nothing would induce her to become a governess, and her determination to have herself trained as a hospital nurse never wavered.

After some months of bickering Mrs. Lancaster was forced to submit to her niece's whim, and steps were taken to enable the young girl to enter St. Christopher's Hospital in East London as a probationer.

Lady nurses were rare in those days, and Mrs. Lancaster's friends spoke a good deal of the strange choice made by her young relative, pitied Mrs. Lancaster on account of the girl's eccentricities, and prophesied absolute failure for Cecilia.

The Lancaster household, however, breathed freely when she had gone. Millie Lancaster was now twenty years of age, Chatty and Helena were eighteen and fifteen respectively. Mrs. Lancaster did not want another girl about the house. Her own girls were quite enough for a careful, anxious, well-meaning mother to have to settle in life. They were ordinary, good-humored, fairly pretty girls, but they were essentially commonplace, and Cecilia, who was uncommon, had the effect of making them look their worst when she was by.

George Lancaster, too, had an unpleasant habit lately of marking her out for attention. Of course he meant nothing by it. What young man in his senses would be mad enough to fall in love with Cecilia Harvey, a penniless, eccentric, disagreeable girl? Still—Mrs. Lancaster meant a good deal when she said "still"—for every reason it was well to have her troublesome niece away.

It was a foggy morning, and the inmates of the large house in Harford Square were feeling the influence of the yellow atmosphere which pervaded the rooms. George, who was in a very good mercantile house in the City, had gone away to his place of business some time ago. Freddie, the youngest son, was from home at a boarding-school. There was no one at home, therefore, but Mrs. Lancaster and the three girls, Millie, Chatty, and Helena, or Lena, as her family were in the habit of calling her.

Mrs. Lancaster was fond of economizing in small ways. One of her pet economies was a parsimonious use of fuel. The drawing-room fire was never lit until late in the day, and the fire in the dining room, whatever the state of the thermometer, was well slacked down immediately after breakfast.

There are perhaps few things more exasperating than a well-slacked fire. Its black exterior strikes a chill to the heart. A slacked fire has an inhospitable, churlish appearance. The small glow of warmth which it retains resembles an angry

and vindictive eye. Mrs. Lancaster liked to have her dining-room fire very well slacked.

When the housemaid had withdrawn after this ceremony, the good lady was in the habit of drawing her armchair well in front of it, pulling up the skirt of her dress to prevent its getting scorched—not that there was the least danger—putting her feet on the fender, and absorbing the contents of the daily paper.

If the morning was cold, therefore, the three girls, who sat about the room employed in various ways, were apt to feel the reverse of amiable.

On this particular morning the fog, joined to the cold, brought the spirits of all four down to a decidedly low ebb. There was an ominous silence for some time, the crackling of the slowly consumed coal and the rustling of Mrs. Lancaster's paper being the only sounds audible in the big room.

Suddenly there came a little scuffling noise, an exclamation, and then a burst of childish tears.

Mrs. Lancaster turned round impatiently:

"Lena, you are really too silly! What, crying again?"

"Chatty pushed me, mamma, and spoiled my drawings."

"She wouldn't give me a glimpse of the fire," said Chatty.

"She is so selfish, always sitting in such a way at the table as to get every scrap of the heat to herself."

Mrs. Lancaster raised her brows in well acted astonishment.

"My dear Chatty, are you cold?" she asked.

"Cold? I should think I am, mamma. Aren't you cold, Millie?"

"I should think so, with a fire like that."

Mrs. Lancaster rose slowly, and put her newspaper on the table.

"A fire like this?" she repeated. "It is a great fire, built half-way up the chimney—its heat must pervade the entire room. No one ought to be cold in a room like this—at least, no Christian person, conscious of her privileges, and thankful for her mercies, ought to be cold."

"Well, mamma, I am cold," said Chatty; "and look at Lena's hands, they are quite blue—and Millie's nose, it's as red——"

"You need not mind about my nose," snapped Millie. "Mamma, if you would allow us to poke the fire."

"Poke the fire!" exclaimed Mrs. Lancaster, in horror. "Why, it has not been slacked down half an hour yet. I

shall certainly not allow it to be poked. Lena, stop crying, and go on with your drawing. Chatty, you are *not* cold; it's absurd to say so. Millie, oh, my dear Millie, what is the matter?"

Millie Lancaster had risen in excitement to her feet.

"Mamma, whom do you think I saw pass the window just now?"

"My dear, I cannot say. Who was it? How excited you look! Why, there's a ring at the front door."

"It's Cecilia, mamma; she has come back."

Mrs. Lancaster suppressed a word of impatience.

The ring was repeated, the hall door was quickly opened, and Cecilia Harvey, in her nurse's dress, came in.

She felt she ought not to appear in the costume of an order she no longer belonged to, but she happened to have no other dress with her at the hospital. She entered the room in her usual fearless, yet excited manner.

"How are you, Aunt Charlotte?" she said.

"How do you do, Cecilia?" responded Mrs. Lancaster, bestowing the tips of her fingers upon her niece, and just touching her cheek with an icy salute.

"What a cold day for you to come out," remarked Millie.

"But you look blooming," continued Chatty. "It is much better for people to go out and take exercise, whatever the weather—I always say so to mamma, but she never minds me."

"Have they given you a whole holiday, Cecil?" asked Helena, in a slightly wistful tone.

Lena was the nicest of the Lancasters, and she was the only one of her cousins for whom Cecilia felt a particle of regard.

"I have not got a holiday," she said, "at least, in other words, I have got a very, very long holiday. I have just been dismissed from St. Christopher's."

"Oh!" was the exclamation which issued from four pairs of feminine lips.

There was dismay, incredulity, anger, and curiosity in these four round "Ohs!"

Cecilia looked full at her aunt as she continued:

"You will be pleased, Aunt Charlotte, to learn that your prophecies with regard to my powers as a hospital nurse have been fulfilled. I have been one month at St. Christopher's, and during that time have abundantly proved that I am not fit to be a hospital nurse."

"Ah! I thought as much," responded Mrs. Lancaster, nodding her head, "I always told you so, Cecilia."

"You did, Aunt Charlotte, and you spoke the truth. I love nursing sick people. I love comforting them—above all things in the world, I love petting and kissing the little sick children, but I only made a sort of story-book nurse, not a real one, for the real good nurse has no heart and no sympathies."

"Folly!" interrupted Mrs. Lancaster. "The real trained nurse is a most valuable person. There is no one in the world whom I respect more than I do the properly trained nurse. You talk like a baby. It is too ridiculous to hear a chit like you running down so noble a profession."

"Oh, I don't, Aunt Charlotte; I respect the trained nurse immensely, but I shall never become one. I had to help in an operation last night—I can't tell you [about it, but—but—I was silly enough and mad enough to faint at the critical moment. The poor little patient's life was endangered by my folly. I may have killed the child, I do not know; perhaps I have. Anyhow, Sister Monica dismissed me this morning. At least, she asked me to send in my resignation, which amounts to the same thing. Here I am, therefore, Aunt Charlotte. I have left St. Christopher's, and, like a bad penny, I have come back."

Mrs. Lancaster did not contradict Cecilia's statement about the bad penny. On the contrary, her compressed lips and cold, angry eyes abundantly confirmed the young girl's statement about herself. Mrs. Lancaster felt so annoyed that she turned her back upon Cecilia, and in her abstraction absolutely poked the well-slacked fire into a gentle blaze.

Millie, who was always observant, took immediate advantage of this to come forward and warm her icy hands. The two other girls stood on each side of Cecilia, looking at her with a mingling of admiration and dismay. They knew that their mother did not want Cecilia to come back, they scarcely wished for her themselves, yet she interested them; her vagaries, her eccentricities, gave a certain excitement to their dull, monotonous lives.

The Lancasters were timid girls, and they could not but admire their cousin's pluck.

Mrs. Lancaster did not ask Cecilia to seat herself; she turned her back upon her niece, and, after a long pause, said in an icy tone:

"May I ask what you propose to do now?"

"I thought," replied Cecilia, with a certain faltering in her voice, "that perhaps you'd let me stay here for a day or two until I——"

"Until you?" responded Mrs. Lancaster, her voice even colder than when she had spoken before.

"Until I find something to do, Aunt Charlotte."

"Will you give up that obstinacy you showed before you went to St. Christopher's, and become a governess?"

"I will never become a governess."

"I may as well tell you, Cecilia, that I shall not keep you here indefinitely."

"May I stay for—for a week? I have no money, or I would not ask this."

"I cannot promise that you may stay for a week, but you may remain until to-morrow. I will think over what is to be done with you. You can go upstairs now—your old room is still at your disposal. Go at once, and take off that dress which you have dishonored. I must say I am thoroughly ashamed of you."

Cecilia left the room without another word. She was joined almost immediately by Chatty and Lena.

"Don't mind mamma, Cecil," said Lena. "We won't let her turn you out until you have something nice to go to. Don't cry, Cecil."

"Oh, dear no!" replied Cecilia, "I would not cry for worlds." Her eyes were very bright, and there was a pink spot on each cheek. She had reached her attic bedroom now. It was dismantled, dusty, full of yellow fog, and icy cold.

Cecilia had just come from a well warmed and well ventilated hospital; she shivered in spite of herself in her wretched room, and, putting her hand to her mouth, sneezed two or three times.

"O Cecil, please don't catch cold," exclaimed Chatty. "Nothing would make mamma so desperately angry."

"You ought to have a fire," said Lena; "you shall have a fire. Mamma never comes up to the attic. I will go and coax Susan to light a good fire in your room; then, when it is all cozy, we three will come up and sit with you, and you shall tell us about the hospital."

"We are awfully curious to know about the operations," exclaimed Chatty. "Did you see many people put under

chloroform, Cecil? I hope you did, for we are longing to hear all about it."

Cecil made no reply.

The servant came in to light a fire in her room. It was then dusted and the bed made, the two girls running backward and forward and helping to make the room nice. The more they did for Cecilia, the more they liked doing things for her. They felt much happier and much warmer than they had done in the dismal dining room. When the fire blazed merrily, and the room looked habitable once more, Miss Harvey changed her nurse's dress, and put on a shabby old childish frock of dark blue serge. It scarcely reached to her feet, and was altogether too small for her.

"You look much prettier in your nurse's dress than in that frock," remarked the frank Charlotte.

"I have no right to wear my nurse's dress," she replied mournfully.

"Well, see; could it not be altered? It is only a very plain dark serge. It seems a pity you should not wear such a nice dress. Of course these plain skirts are not the fashion, and there is a funny little train at the back which must be cut off."

"That train is awfully becoming to you, Cecil," interrupted Lena.

"Oh, yes," continued Charlotte, "but that is not the point. Mamma will be very angry if this dress turns out useless. I think we had better ask Hamilton to take it in hand and make it fit for Cecil to wear every day."

Cecilia sat on the side of her small bed; she was not interested in the subject of her dress. She hated the dress as part of the life she must no longer share; but she let her cousins talk on, for she felt too languid and too miserable to arouse herself to answer them. She was thinking all the time of her coming interview with Dr. Digby, and wondering how she could get back to St. Christopher's Hospital that night without letting either her aunt or her cousins know.

She was not the sort of girl to be deterred by obstacles, but she knew well that to reach St. Christopher's at nine o'clock, the time which the doctor had named, she would not be able to sit out the long and wearisome dinner, which, beginning at half-past seven, lasted for an interminable time each evening.

Dinner was the great ceremony of the day in the Harford

Square house. The girls were expected to appear at it in evening dress, and although the dining room was as cold then as in the morning, and the soup, the fish, the *entrées* were mysteriously devoid of flavor, still the dreary ordeal had a certain imposing effect, and nothing so insured Mrs. Lancaster's displeasure as any one of her family absenting themselves from this august ceremony.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HOUSE PHYSICIAN.

ST. CHRISTOPHER'S had never known a more popular house physician than Laurence Digby. He had risen to his present post by the usual steps which are open to a medical student at one of our great hospitals. For some years he had been connected with this large hospital in East London, and was now a recognized part of the institution.

To speak of St. Christopher's was to bring up a vision of Digby's rugged but kindly face.

He was rather above the middle height; his every movement gave the idea of quick though deliberate action. He was well made, and, although he slightly stooped and his face was old for his years, it was impossible not to remark a certain power about the man which gave him distinction. His hair, which had been jet-black, was slightly tinged with gray at the temples. His face wore a subdued though firm expression, as if he was familiar with the sorrowful side of life. In his eyes was a continual play of latent fire conveying the idea of both pathos and humor.

A depth of knowledge, seriousness of purpose, and complete assurance gave the greatest confidence to his patients at all times. He was a man who carefully studied each individual case brought under his notice, and, having made his diagnosis, nothing could make him alter his opinion. He did not hesitate to tell people his true thoughts and opinions about a case, a trait which accounted, perhaps, for the faith which the medical students put in his diagnosis, though it was likely to bring him enemies in his career. He did not hesitate to tell women what he thought of their ailments, and they unhesitatingly felt that they must put aside all imaginings, or they would get but little sympathy from Digby. The doctor was a highly qualified man, and, being fond of study, it was no effort on his part to continue it now in his busy career.

Digby's face, very grave when in repose, nevertheless was capable of a sudden, swift, and wonderfully bright glance, and when something really pleased him his smile was like a flash of sunshine. His deeply set dark eyes were capable of expressing many emotions, and but for his lips, which were firm and inflexible in outline, might have told his thoughts too freely.

Apart from his work Digby was a pleasant fellow. When he was the man, not the doctor, he could be genial, jolly, pleasant in speech, and sympathetic in manner.

Other men spoke of him as a "right good fellow," and, although he had hitherto made no special friend of any one woman, all women liked him.

As physician, however, Digby showed a considerable portion of the reverse of this pleasant picture. He could be sharp, stern, unmerciful to the smallest negligence on the part of those whose duty it was to carry out his orders. With a keen word, and a keener glance, he would tear all flimsy excuses to tatters. No nurse who failed to carry out her duty could look for mercy at his hands.

In the hospital Digby's unswervingly high sense of duty had produced a moral reform. The nurses, who began by disliking the man who expected so much from them, ended by adopting his standard, and striving to obtain the hearty word of thanks which always awaited them when they had helped to bring one of the doctor's patients through the dark valley of the shadow of death into the bright sunshine of health. No one could give more hearty and unqualified praise than Digby. He was as lavish with approval, when it was honestly earned, as he was with blame when it was needed.

From the medical students the house physician at St. Christopher's exacted even more than he did from the nurses. He had no patience with young fellows who were not in love with their profession.

"It's the grandest or the basest thing in the world to be a doctor," he was often heard to say. "The man who takes up the medical profession ought to love it better than his life. Neither the desire for money nor for fame ought to influence him. The Heaven-born doctor has been sent into the world to make suffering less. Every day in his life he has to keep death at bay. It is impossible for him to treat his calling lightly."

The clinical clerk, therefore, had often a bad time when

Digby was at St. Christopher's, and he rejoiced to think that he was the means of pulling some tares out of the wheat. Nothing pleased him better than to open the eyes of the medical students who had no real love for their calling, and to get them to adopt some other means of earning a living before it was too late.

On the morning on which Cecilia Harvey left the hospital, Digby, having dismissed the last of his out-patients, came upstairs to go the round of the wards.

For some reason he did not feel in a good temper, and the clerks who accompanied him knew that they must be careful to miss no word which their superior spoke, or his eagle eye would be certain to mark them out for instant and severe reproof.

The accident which had occurred the night before had roused the doctor's very keen anger. Part of this had been directed toward the ignorant young nurse, but the larger share of Laurence Digby's wrath had been turned in upon himself.

In so critical a case why had he accepted the help of an untrained and nervous girl? Suppose, owing to his own folly, Number Three in the children's ward had died under the operation?

Poor little boy—Tommy, Nurse Harvey had called him—suppose Tommy had died?

The doctor gave an inward shudder as he recalled the narrow shave which his little patient had undergone.

He thought of him the moment he entered the children's ward, and gave but scant attention to the other cases, so anxious was he to see Number Three.

Tommy was better; the doctor gave a quick sigh of relief.

The sweet little face, very pale, very tiny, very pathetic, looked less painfully anxious than it had done the night before. The blue eyes raised to the doctor's face were full of baby peace, the small beautiful mouth was restful.

"This child is doing well, Nurse?" said Digby, speaking in a tone of interrogation to Sister Agatha.

She nodded a quick response. "I had little hope of him until an hour ago," she said; "since then there has been a marked change for the better."

The doctor proceeded to put the usual questions, looked at the card which recorded the child's temperature when it was last taken, then he applied his stethoscope to the little chest.

"Yes," he said, smiling down affectionately on Tommy,

"you are much better, my little man. I told you last night that if you were a good boy you would most likely get well. See what comes of being a good boy. You are really getting well."

Tommy's lips moved. Digby bent over him.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Tell her to come," said Tommy. "The lady wot kissed me. Tell her to come back."

The child's few words were so clear and so sweet, that they were heard, not only by doctor and nurse, but by all the students who had gathered round the bed.

Sister Agatha found herself flushing angrily. She bent forward, almost pushing Digby aside.

"If Number Three will be a good boy," she said, "he shall have everything that is necessary for him."

She fixed her stern gray eyes on the child as she spoke.

Her words took instant effect. The little eager, longing face grew faintly pink, the small head sank deeper into the pillow, the baby lips did not speak again.

Sister Agatha raised herself and addressed the doctor.

"You'll agree with me that the child is really better, Dr. Digby?"

Digby, who had been looking at Tommy in some bewilderment, resumed his professional manner with a start.

"I do think your little charge much better, Nurse," he said. "There is no reaccumulation of fluid in the pericardium, and there is a regularity and tone about the heart's action which tell me that the operation I performed last night has been successful."

"Is there any likelihood of the fluid returning?" asked Sister Agatha.

"That is possible, but scarcely likely. The child is doing very well, and my operation has undoubtedly saved his life."

Here Digby turned swiftly, and addressed the young men who were standing round the child's bed.

"This case, gentlemen, brings me to a most interesting discussion," he said. "It is well known that there is a close, though ill-understood relationship between the four diseases known as pericarditis, scarlet fever, St. Vitus's dance or chorea, and rheumatic fever. Those who have suffered from scarlet fever seem peculiarly susceptible to rheumatic fever or chorea, both of which, as you all know, are the most

frequent causes of pericarditis. I have several times seen all four conditions, and never have I witnessed recovery when such has been the case. This child had originally scarlet fever in a mild degree. Rheumatic fever followed, and now he suffers from pericarditis. I had little or no hope of saving the little patient last night, but now, owing to my timely interference, he is recovering."

"Pardon me," said a voice, and one of the oldest of the medical clerks took a step forward. He was a big fellow, exceedingly well dressed. His manners were assertive, his eyes insolent.

"Pardon me, Dr. Digby," he repeated. "Do you not think that, had you left the pericardium alone, the condition of the patient would, at least, have been as well as it is now?"

Digby's eyes flashed with an angry fire. He paused for half a minute, then his reply came slowly:

"Had you, sir," he said, looking full at his questioner, "taken the trouble to read up the notes on this case which, I am sure, Mr. Everard would have obliged you with, or had you been regular in attendance and seen the condition of the patient, your question, which I must call wanting in sense, would never have been put."

Phillips, the medical clerk, turned a dark red. One of the youngest of the students tittered. Digby thought the titter came from Phillips. But for this belief he might not have made his next remark.

"And if," he continued, glancing with scorn at the sulky, conceited youth, "you would learn, Phillips, to pay less attention to your button-hole and the set of your tie, and give more time to reading up your cases, it might be better for you. Come, gentlemen, we will see how Number Four fares."

The whole party moved on to inspect the next patient. Phillips accompanied the others, the dull red which suffused his face giving place to a deadly pallor.

During the rest of the morning Digby's irritation of manner was so marked that it was noticed by more than one nurse and medical student.

Late that evening two of the students were standing together in the entrance-hall. Digby walked past them on his way to his own rooms. He was off duty to-night, and was going to take a few hours' rest.

"They say that Digby is one of the cleverest men in the

medical line that we have ever had at St. Christopher's," remarked one of the students to his fellow. "It is a pity that he won't be with us much longer."

"Is his year in office nearly up?" asked the other. "I can never imagine St. Christopher's without Digby."

"Well, it will have to do without him. His time as resident physician will have expired in a month or two. It is my belief that some of our fellows will be very glad when he goes. It's all very well to be so sure of your popularity that you think you can say anything, but Digby may go too far. He did give Phillips one for himself to-day."

"Oh, didn't he!" laughed the other man, "and didn't Phillips look uncommonly sick?"

"Well," said the medical student who had spoken first, "you know Phillips is not a fool, and lots of good men question the advisability of touching the pericardium. I know Fairfax does, for I heard him say so the other day."

"Right or wrong, I am very glad Digby did sit on Phillips this morning," answered the other man. "Phillips wants taking down a peg. Digby is the best fellow in the world, and knows his work well. I cannot understand Phillips—he is always asking Digby questions with a view to humiliating him. I think for some reason he is jealous of him."

The two students were standing on one side of the wide entrance-hall. At this moment their attention was arrested by the appearance of a young lady who came timidly forward and addressed a question to the hall porter, which he did not immediately answer. The color flushed into her face, and her eyes met those of the student who had stood up for Digby.

He recognized her with a start—she was the pretty nurse who had spoken to him that morning, and asked her way to the out-patients' department.

With a queer sense of confusion, for he did not know what to make of her altered dress, the young man came forward and said in a respectful tone:

"Can I do anything for you?"

"Oh, thank you," said Cecilia—she smiled gratefully, she also remembered him. "I used to be a nurse here," she said, "but I have left. You directed me to the out-patients' part of the hospital this morning. I wanted to see Dr. Digby. I want to see him now again. He asked me to call about nine o'clock."

"He is in his own room at this hour," said Ashley, the

young medical clerk; "this is his week off duty, so he is pretty sure to be at home. I will go and tell him you are here, Miss——" he hesitated, waiting for Cecilia to supply the name.

"Miss Harvey," she said, "please tell him that Miss Harvey has called by appointment."

Digby had forgotten all about Cecilia's promised visit. The day had been a particularly busy one—the child Tommy Constantine was doing well, and the doctor no longer had him on his mind—the whole circumstance, therefore, of last night had passed into oblivion, and when Ashley said that a young lady of the name of Harvey wanted to see him, Digby looked up from the heap of papers he was busy sorting with an irritated and puzzled expression.

"I do not know the name," he said.

"She used to be here as one of the nurses," said Ashley.

The doctor's brow cleared.

"Ah yes—now I remember," he said. "Show her in, Ashley; she wants to ask me a question. I told her she might call."

Two or three moments later the doctor's room door was again opened, and Cecilia entered.

"I beg your pardon," said Digby; he started to his feet, the color suffusing his face. "The fact is, I forgot you were coming—I beg your pardon for troubling you to come here to see me."

Inwardly he was soliloquizing:

"These lady nurses are always putting one in the wrong. One never knows how to treat them. As nurses in the hospital they are bound to obey their doctor—once they leave the hospital they take the position of a lady toward a gentleman. I have taken a liberty with this girl in asking her to call on me here. She is undoubtedly a lady, and I have not treated her as such."

"Sit here," said Digby aloud, motioning Cecilia to take possession of his own comfortable chair. "Did anyone bring you? Did you come from far?"

"I have come from Harford Square, where my aunt lives," she replied, looking at the perturbed doctor in a puzzled way. "Of course I have come alone."

"I will see you back," said Digby, "or rather, I will send for a cab, and you shall drive back. This is no hour for you to come here by yourself."

"Oh, it is no matter. I am quite safe. I was very anxious

to see you, and when one is anxious, the little trouble I have taken means nothing—nothing whatever.”

“You want to ask me a question. I remember you were troubled about the child. I can relieve your mind on his account—he is doing well; he will live.”

“I am very, very glad!”

“Yes, you have cause to be grateful. The kind of accident which occurred last night might have been fatal to the little fellow.”

“I know,” said Cecilia. She lowered her eyes; her lips trembled.

The doctor looked at her with an expression on his face which said plainly, “Now I have answered your inquiry, I hope you will go away.”

Cecilia did not see Digby’s eyes; she was thinking. After a time she raised her head.

“You don’t think me fit for a nurse?”

“Of course I don’t. I told you so this morning. The fact is, I don’t approve of lady nurses. You are a lady; you are meant to grace your own sphere.”

“Please don’t talk conventionalities,” said Cecilia impatiently.

“I will say nothing further. You are unfitted to be a nurse. I am glad that you are going to take to something else.” He looked toward the door as he spoke. Would not Miss Harvey understand that he wished her to go; would she have no pity on the scant leisure of a very busy man?

She was lost in her own thoughts, and did not stir.

After a time she said, slowly:

“I heard one of the students say, as I passed through the entrance hall, that you were off duty to-night. Does that mean that you are at leisure?”

“It means, Miss Harvey, that I have got an hour or two at my own disposal. Do not imagine that these precious hours have nothing to fill them. When you came in I was engaged in scientific research of an important nature. Do you know what that means?”

“I do not quite know, but I am sure it is interesting. I love science.”

Cecilia’s eyes were lit up with a surprisingly bright ray. The doctor could not help smiling.

“Indeed!” he said. “I did not know that science came into the lives of young ladies.”

"If you will try and think of me," said Cecilia, "as a girl—not as a young lady and—if you will believe that I have a very real and earnest wish to make something of my life, perhaps you will change your tone, and be less—less slighting."

The doctor felt too astonished to speak.

"And," she continued, "I am going to make a request. I know you wish me to go away, but as you have a little leisure this evening I am going to ask you to devote some of it to me."

"Oh, certainly," said Digby. He relapsed into another chair with an inward groan.

"I know you are a kind man," said Cecilia.

"I am not sure about that, Miss Harvey. I am a man with a strong temper and——"

"I won't take you at your own estimate," interrupted Cecilia. "I know you are very kind, and I have no one to advise me. I would not come to you if I had anyone else. Please give me your reasons for saying that I ought never to be a nurse. Please give me your real reasons." She raised her eyes imploringly.

No face could look sweeter than hers, no voice could utter its desires in a clearer and yet in a more pathetic tone.

Dr. Digby was a gentleman. The expression of annoyance passed now from his face. He was truly sorry that he had ever asked Miss Harvey to visit him in his private room, but now that she was here he could not tell her to go against her will. He must make the best of circumstances, and speak as wisely and as much to the point as he could.

"I can give my reasons in a few words," he said. "You are physically unfit for the duties of a nurse."

"Oh!" interrupted Cecilia, "you are looking at the matter from a medical point of view."

"It is the only point from which I can possibly regard it. If girls who mean to take up the profession of nursing would have the good sense to consult their family doctors before entering on the life, it would be an admirable thing for them and for the unhappy patients who are to be victimized by their want of skill and nerve."

"But the patients upstairs are fond of me. I could always make little Tommy happy, and in the women's ward—oh! I could do a great deal for those poor women. They did not only want to be fed and doctored. Most of them had troubled hearts, and I could soothe their troubles. Is that no part of

a nurse's life? I think it ought to be. I think there ought to be a special nurse to go round the wards and cheer the souls of the patients a little."

"You are a queer girl," said Digby. "I believe there is something in your words, and as a nurse of that sort you might, with training, be invaluable. Do you know that little Tommy asked for you to-day? He would have given a great deal to see you. You might visit a hospital two or three times a week. I am sure you would be very popular as a visitor."

"You have not yet told me why I am not to be more than a visitor."

"My dear young lady, you are unfitted for the life; you have a very highly strung, nervous organism, you are not strong, you are impulsive. You are not calm in a moment of danger. That you have strong sympathies, that you have the kindest of hearts, I feel assured, but these things do not go far when courage, calmness, and self-possession are wanting. It is a sad fact that the best nurses are not those who feel too much. You feel things a *great* deal too much."

"Thank you," said Cecilia. The color rushed all over her face. "I did not know before what a nurse ought really to be. Sister Agatha is probably your idea of a perfect nurse."

"Sister Agatha is an admirable nurse," replied Digby, with emphasis.

"I hate Sister Agatha," retorted Cecilia, with equal emphasis. She rose as she spoke.

"I will ring and order a cab for you," said the doctor.

"No, please don't; I prefer to walk home. Before I go, I want to say one thing more. I was coming through Ward B this morning—the ward where I was on duty. There was a woman in the ward—I think she is called Number Forty-eight. It is a horrid practice to call people by numbers; I never would adopt it. To me the woman was Mrs. Murray (she liked to be called Mrs. Murray). She was very ill this morning; she said she was dying. Mrs. Murray's husband is a bad man; he is in prison somewhere. She asked me to meet him when he came out and to take him a message from her. She was just going to tell me the name of the prison where he is serving his time, and to give me a message, when Sister Agatha came and insisted on my going with her to see Sister Monica. I never got Mrs. Murray's message. Would it be possible for you, Dr. Digby, to get the message and send it

to me? Even if I am never to be a nurse, I should like to do the last thing that poor creature wants doing for her."

Digby took out his note-book.

"In which ward is the woman?" he asked.

"Ward B in the left wing."

"And what is her number?"

"Forty-eight," replied Cecilia.

"I will try and do what you want," he said, "and will write to you. What is your address?"

"My aunt is called Mrs. Lancaster. She lives in 50 Harford Square, Bloomsbury."

"Thank you, I will write to you there if the woman whom you call Murray is alive and I can get her message to give you. If you do not hear you will know that the poor creature has died."

"I hope—I earnestly hope that she will be alive."

"I hope so, too, if she has anything on her mind."

"You won't forget to speak to her, Dr. Digby?"

"No, I never forget the things that I have promised to attend to." He smiled as he spoke.

"I have no excuse to stay longer," said Cecilia. "I am going back now to my aunt's; you have taken my last hope away."

"I am sorry for that; but, forgive me, you speak like a very young girl; you will have plenty of new hopes to-morrow."

"I do not know; I shall probably go into a shop."

"What do you mean?"

"I cannot stay with the Lancasters more than a day or two, and I have no money of my own."

"Why cannot you stay with your relatives? You are the sort of girl who ought to be in a comfortable home, who ought to do nothing but play the piano, and sing, and do fancy work, and pour out tea in the evening. I had a sister once who was something like you."

"Oh, and did she live that horrible existence?"

"Do you call it so? It is woman's true province—making a home happy. My sister died." Digby's face looked sad. "We were all very tender with her," he said; "we would not let a rough breath blow on her. She was something like you. I know now whom you have reminded me of from the first."

His face was full of sympathy as he spoke; he came close to Cecilia and looked at her so earnestly, with such a fixed

gaze of tender memory and softened, sorrowful admiration, that she turned away at last in distress.

"Forgive me," he said in his brusque way, "I was thinking of my young sister. You will stay with Mrs. Lancaster; you are not at all strong, you ought not to have any rough work in life. We all have our fitting portions; the back is suited for the burden. Your's must carry a light weight."

"Good-by," she said, holding out her hand to him. Her eyes were full of tears.

The doctor took her hand, held it limply between his own, dropped it, and turned away. When he looked round Cecilia was gone. He had forgotten all about the cab he meant to order for her. He was so lost in reverie that he did not notice when she walked to his room door, opened it for herself, and closed it softly behind her.

CHAPTER VII.

A TEST AND A RESULT.

MRS. LANCASTER felt that Cecilia Harvey had no just claim on her. She was her dead husband's niece, not her own.

In Mrs. Lancaster's opinion Cecilia was a self-willed, disagreeable girl. She refused to walk in the beaten paths, and that fact alone was an unpardonable sin in the eyes of this excellent but narrow-minded woman.

Had Cecilia been a good, amiable girl, had she acted as Millie and Charlotte and Helena would have acted had they been similiarly placed, Mrs. Lancaster felt that no one could possibly have been kinder than she would have been. She would have looked out for a very nice situation for her niece. She would have made careful inquiries regarding the family with whom she placed her. She would have ascertained all necessary particulars with regard to their morals, their religion, their ways and doings. Cecilia should have two or perhaps three (Mrs. Lancaster felt sure in her own mind that she would not allow her niece to undertake the charge of more than three) "sweet little girls." These children should love her, be devoted to her, think no one like her. Cecilia should be an ideal governess and live in an ideal home.

Then in the holidays, who so glad to receive her as Aunt Charlotte? She would have an affectionate welcome from her

aunt and from her cousins; and her salary, Mrs. Lancaster resolved, in her own mind, should be further eked out by the present of sufficient material in good Cheviot serge to make up a winter dress, or if the time was summer one or two of Millie's cast-off gowns might be lengthened to fit her.

Mrs. Lancaster thought with satisfaction that if these things could only be, if Cecilia could only be turned into a model niece, how very admirably she would pose as a model aunt. If there was one thing more than another in this world of tears which the good lady prized it was the esteem of her fellows.

She was not aware herself of this very marked feature in her character; she little guessed when her name headed subscription lists, and when she exerted herself for the bazaar for the Blind Boys' Mission, and for the concert for the Orphan Daughters of Poor Curates, that Mammon in reality had a larger share in the affair than God.

Mrs. Lancaster knew nothing of this. On the contrary, she thanked her Maker day by day for making her not as others, and went through life with a beaming ray of self-contentment in her heart.

Cecilia was, however, in all particulars the reverse of the model niece. She would not be a governess, and now she had ignominiously failed as a nurse.

Mrs. Lancaster sent her up to her attic, and spent the rest of the day mourning over her delinquencies.

At dinner that evening, after the solemn function of partaking of the watery soup was over, Mrs. Lancaster observed Cecilia's vacant place at table, and vouchsafed to comment upon it.

"Where is your cousin, Helena?" she asked of her youngest daughter.

"Mamma, Cecilia told me to tell you that she had a bad headache, and did not want any dinner."

Mrs. Lancaster was about to remark severely on the subject of her niece's headache, when there came a loud interruption from the other end of the table.

"Hullo!" exclaimed George, "you don't mean to tell me, Lena, that Humpty Dumpty is back again?"

"I wish you would not call your cousin by that objectionable name, George," said his mother.

Young Lancaster shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"I say, Lena," he repeated, "has Cecilia come back?"

"Oh, yes, George; she arrived after breakfast to-day."

"About half-past eleven," said Chatty.

"No, Chatty, not so late as that, for the fire wasn't long slacked down."

"Who cares about the fire?" interrupted George. "So Cecilia is back? I suppose she has got a couple of days' holiday? Why isn't she at dinner?"

Millie, who always took her cue from her mother and had been watching her parent's face, now remarked lugubriously:

"No indeed; Cecil is not taking a holiday."

"I grieve to tell you, George," said Mrs. Lancaster, "that Cecilia has made a sad fiasco of her nursing career. I knew this would be the case, but I did not think, even in my most dismal forebodings, that she would have been sent from St. Christopher's in disgrace."

"Hallo!" said George. "Too pretty, I expect. Jealousy is sure to be at the bottom of it."

This remark was like a bomb-shell, and voices rose at once in angry protest.

"George! What do you mean? Cecilia is not a bit pretty." This was Millie's remark.

"Poor, gawky, overgrown thing!" This came from Chatty's lips.

Helena was silent, she looked at her plate.

Mrs. Lancaster, too, was silent, but her eyes flashed fire in a very ominous fashion.

"Jealousy, jealousy," remarked George. "You know perfectly well, girls, that none of you can hold a candle to Humpty Dumpty. She'll be an awfully pretty girl some day, and for my part I think her good-looking now."

"My dears," said Mrs. Lancaster, raising her voice in solemn and full tone above the babel of the young ones, "we will, if you please, cease to discuss your cousin's appearance. We all know, all of us who read our Bibles, what the wise man says of mere good looks, 'Favor is deceitful and beauty is vain.'"

"Oh, come now, mother," exclaimed George. "You know you *can't* mean that beauty is vain." He gave his mother a quick, half comical, half shame-faced glance which she interpreted with much uneasiness.

During the evening and the night which followed the good woman had an anxious time.

It would be too awful if George took it into his head to flirt with Cecilia.

Mrs. Lancaster loved her son George after the fashion of such mothers. She would heap upon him every good thing that harmonized with her own wishes, but if he were to lose his heart to a penniless girl she would oppose him with all her strength, and frustrate his wishes by every device of which her essentially feminine heart was capable.

Mrs. Lancaster knew nothing of her niece's evening visit to St. Christopher's. She heard her neither come in nor go out; she imagined she was suffering from a headache in her own room, and, although herself a truly Christian woman, it did not occur to her to pay a visit of condolence to the suffering girl.

Had she done so, had she seen the empty nest from which the willful little bird had flown, and perceived that Cecilia had only made a flimsy excuse not to appear at dinner, many subsequent events might never have occurred.

It was late when she returned to Harford Square. She still felt a good deal excited, and ran swiftly up to her attic unperceived by anyone in the house.

The fire which had been lit in the morning had long ago expired, and the little room looked empty and desolate. She threw off her gray cloak and tossed her hat on the bed, and, clasping her hands before her, sank into a chair and sat lost in thought.

Her visit to Digby had both excited and disappointed her. She had hoped against hope that he would retract his verdict of the morning, that even if he did not think it well for her to return to St. Christopher's he would use all his influence (and surely the house physician's influence was immense) in trying to get her a post in another hospital.

But Digby had said that under no circumstances could Cecilia resume her duties as nurse. It was not in her to be a good nurse.

"Not in me," repeated the willful girl under her breath, "when my whole soul and all the strength of my nature longs to relieve suffering, to help the sorrowful, to lighten the lot of those who are in pain. I know Dr. Digby is mistaken, and yet what happened last night—oh, is it really only twenty-four hours ago—will come between me and my chances of receiving a post as nurse in any other institution forever. I must give it up; I must turn to something else. Nothing will induce me to be dependent, and I won't teach—I won't, because I can't. Now what shall I do?"

An hour or so earlier, as Cecilia was leaving St. Christopher's, she came face to face with Phillips, the handsome but conceited medical student who had received Digby's rebuff at the clinical lecture with so bad a grace.

Phillips was very quick at recognizing faces, and the moment he saw Cecilia, in her gray cloak and big black hat, he knew her to be the young nurse whom more than one student had admired for the indefinable charm which she undoubtedly possessed. Cecilia was looking really pretty at this moment, her cheeks were suffused with that lovely rose color which added to the expression of her face, and brought out the latent power of her intellect. It was a face full of soul, of tenderness, of regret, of sweetness, that glanced at Phillips as she went hurriedly by.

"I say," he exclaimed, "you are Nurse Harvey, are you not?"

"I was Nurse Harvey," said Cecilia. "I am no longer connected with the hospital, therefore the word nurse ceases to apply to me. Good-evening."

She bent her head with a slight stately inclination and walked on. Phillips did not attempt to say anything more, but he knew well enough that she had just come from Digby's room. This little circumstance was to bear fruit by and by, but Cecilia forgot all about it as she sat in her attic and thought about her future. When the house was quiet, and she imagined that every soul in it had gone to bed, there came a tap at her bedroom door, and Helena, her youngest cousin, came in.

"How is your headache now, Cecil?"

"Quite well, thank you," answered Cecilia. "You ought to be in bed, Lena."

Helena glanced at the cloak and hat which were lying carelessly across Cecilia's little bed, then she glanced at her cousin, and a mischievous smile played round her lips.

"You ought to be very fond of me," she said, "for I have been feeling dreadfully wicked on your account. I knew you had gone out, but I told no one. It was wicked of me to keep it from mamma. You ought to be grateful to me—are you, Cecil?—for I have committed a sin on your account."

"Oh no, you have not," said Cecilia, springing to her feet and kissing her cousin, "you are much the best and much the nicest, and by and by you will be far and away the prettiest, of the Lancasters. You are the only one of my cousins I am

a bit fond of. I did go out on important business, and you are never to tell—never, never, never! Now, good-night.”

“You won’t tell me about it?” said Helena, in a wistful voice.

“I cannot say anything, but that I love you. Kiss me; run away now, or Aunt Charlotte may hear us talking.”

Helena warmly returned Cecilia’s embrace, then she ran out of the room.

The next day Mrs. Lancaster informed her daughters that one or two friends were coming to dinner.

“You must put on your best dresses,” she said. “I want you all to look particularly nice, for Mrs. Dalrymple will be here.”

“Anyone else, mamma?” asked Chatty.

“Only George’s friend, Mr. Phillips. By the way, he is a St. Christopher’s man. Do you happen to know him, Cecilia?”

“Perhaps I do,” said Cecilia; “I may know him by sight, but there are so many medical students at St. Christopher’s that I cannot possibly say whether I am acquainted with this Mr. Phillips until I see him.”

“He is coming to dine to-night,” repeated Mrs. Lancaster. “George has invited him. George and he are special friends. I am anxious to meet him, for I hear he is a charming young fellow. His talents indicate for him a career of great promise, and he has a large private income besides.”

Mrs. Lancaster left the room, and Chatty immediately turned to look gravely at her two sisters. She then said:

“Who do you think mamma really means us to put on our best frocks for, Mrs. Dalrymple or Mr. Phillips?”

“Hush!” said Millie. “You shouldn’t say those sort of things, Chatty. It is very disrespectful to mamma, and you know she is quite the last person in the world to have ideas of that sort.”

“Of what sort?” asked Chatty.

“I am not going to say—don’t let us talk of it any more. Here comes mamma. Mamma, do you know that the white dress I wore at the Cravens’ a week ago is very dirty and tossed, and Chatty’s pink evening dress is torn in front. We have nothing that can be really called best to put on to-night.”

“Oh dear, how provoking!” exclaimed Mrs. Lancaster, “that will never do. I particularly want you all to look nice, for Mrs. Dalrymple has not seen you for years.”

"What are we to do, mamma?" asked the gentle Millie, "we really have nothing else to wear."

"I shall buy you new sashes when I go out, and your dresses must be ironed over by Hamilton. Helena, it doesn't much matter about you; you are quite a child still, and I know one of your muslin dresses was washed last week, you shall wear that."

"It is hideous, mother."

"Never mind, you must be satisfied. A washing muslin is quite the correct thing for a little girl."

Helena pouted, the color flushed into her face, and she looked down angrily. Presently she looked up and said, in a questioning voice, in which there was some small suppressed malice:

"Mother, you can't say that Cecilia is not grown up; what dress is she to wear?"

"That is her own affair," answered Mrs. Lancaster, in an icy voice.

That evening the two elder girls came down to dinner in pretty dresses with new sashes. Helena, looking something like Cinderella, only without the smuts, followed in her sisters' train. George was standing by the fire, and he pulled his younger sister toward him.

"You look all right," he whispered—then he added quickly, "Helena, let me introduce you to my friend Phillips."

Phillips, who was really a very handsome young man, condescended to speak kindly and pleasantly to Helena, and the child, delighted with his notice, soon forgot her shabby frock.

Mrs. Dalrymple, an elderly lady, unremarkable in every sense of the word, was presently announced. Dinner followed, and the little party went down to the dining room.

They were all seated at the table when Cecilia, looking flurried, nervous, and slightly defiant, came in. There was an empty chair exactly facing the one in which Phillips was sitting; she dropped into it and began hurriedly to unfold her napkin, and partake, with a hand which shook, of the soup which the waiter, hired for the occasion, placed before her.

Cecilia had not attempted to dress for dinner; her dark dress was high to the throat, she had pinned a lace ruffle round her neck, which was kept in its place by a lovely pearl brooch, which she had inherited from her mother, and, careless of the

incongruity of pearls and serge, she had stuck a butterfly of the same into her bright hair.

No one made any remark when she came in, but when at last she took courage to raise her eyes, she found that both Phillips and George were bestowing upon her frequent and earnest glances.

Phillips was amazed to find that Nurse Harvey was a relation of the Lancasters. George was exultingly saying to himself that he was right about Humpty Dumpty, and that she was undoubtedly growing prettier every day.

"By Jove! I never met a girl like her," he kept saying under his breath. "If she was dressed as she ought to be, and if she was properly fed, why she'd take the town by storm."

Phillips, too, was struck by the fact that Cecilia's face was a peculiarly interesting and uncommon one, but his heart felt absolutely cool and indifferent to her, and his mind, which did dwell upon her as the most interesting person present, was only anxiously revolving in what way he could make use of his knowledge of last night in order to humiliate Digby.

As the Lancasters were neither intellectual nor, in the strictest sense of the word, society people, the conversation which took place at their table belonged, as a matter of course, to a very narrow order of small talk.

Mrs. Lancaster got all her ideas of politics from certain newspapers of a narrow evangelical bias. Her views on life in general were gathered from her own meager experience, from the parish magazine (a novelty twenty years ago), and from the gossip at the Dorcas Society, of which she was an active member.

Mrs Dalrymple also belonged to the Dorcas Society, in its infancy, too, in those days, for befriending young servants.

Mrs. Dalrymple sat next to George, who had taken her down to dinner, and while he listened to her small remarks on the depravity of the masses, and on the valiant efforts their Christian clergyman, Mr. Ward, made to redeem them, his eyes constantly traveled to where his cousin Cecilia sat in her old lace ruffles, pearl ornaments, and serge dress.

Phillips, who was obliged to make himself fairly attentive to Millie and to reply to Mrs. Lancaster's prosiest of conversation, was also watching Cecilia, but with a very different motive. He was fond of coming to sudden conclusions, and the flush of excitement on the ex-probationer's face the night before did not escape him.

If she had left St. Christopher's, what was she doing in Digby's room? Was she interested in Digby? Did he admire her?

Phillips had a scrupulously polite air and manner. He replied to every word his hostess addressed to him. He gently tickled Millie's vanity by paying her the sort of compliments which a well-bred man can address to a girl who considers herself a lady. These delicately veiled speeches were new to her, and she found them very sweet. She little guessed that the thoughts of the young man who addressed her in such pretty language were in reality far away. He was watching his turn to come to a conclusion which might be arrived at through diplomacy.

Mrs. Lancaster did not know why she began to speak of St. Christopher's Hospital. Phillips was politely pleased to reply to the questions she chose to put to him. He drew her on to ask for particulars with regard to his life and work. He replied in that clearly modulated voice which can always be heard a good way off.

By degrees a silence fell on the rest of the company. They were all listening to Mrs. Lancaster and Phillips. He glanced across at Cecilia; she had dropped her knife and fork. The hired waiter offered her an *entrée*, which she declined.

"Oh, if you want me to tell you about the doctors," said Phillips, "there is no one to compare to Digby—Laurence Digby. He's what you call a popular man—very much admired—especially by the nurses."

Phillips thought that Cecilia would drop her eyes when he made this last remark. She did not; on the contrary, she raised them, and fixed them on his face.

He gave her a swift glance, and went on talking as calmly as if he did not know that her color was coming and going, and her heart was beating more quickly than was good for her.

"Yes," continued Phillips, "Laurence Digby is *the* man at St. Christopher's. There'll be weeping and wailing when he goes, as go he must in about three months' time. He's the house physician now, and that post is only open to him for about a year."

"You speak of Dr. Digby as if he had been at St. Christopher's for a long time," remarked Mrs. Lancaster.

"So he has," replied Phillips. "He had just been made assistant house physician when I arrived, having gone through

the lower grades to the satisfaction of the authorities. Digby has always taken a considerable amount of authority on himself, but nurses like that sort of thing."

He laughed, and glanced at Cecilia.

Mrs. Lancaster, who had followed his eyes, hastened to keep him from addressing her niece.

"Pardon me for saying such a thing, Mr. Phillips, but you speak as if you did not personally care for this favorite doctor."

Phillips shrugged his shoulders and spoke lightly.

"What is my opinion worth?" he said; "I am only one of the dressers. No, of course, Mrs. Lancaster, you don't know what that means—I will explain it another time. When Digby leaves St. Christopher's he is certain to buy a West-end practice—that is, if he has money. We none of us can tell whether he is rich or poor. He is rather a mystery to us, but that rather enhances his value."

"What aged man is he?"

"Not young for his present post; about two-and-thirty, I should say."

"Is he really clever, Mr. Phillips?"

"Oh, as to that, it is not for me to say. We all have our special ideas with regard to talent. He is fully qualified, if that is what you mean. He took his degree at Cambridge, and is now M. B. of London. Yes, as far as qualifications are worth, Digby is competent to fill any post."

"Yes; but is he *really* clever? You ought to tell us, Mr. Phillips. Ought he not, Mrs. Dalrymple? It is so nice to get behind the scenes, and anything said—in *confidence*, you quite understand, Mr. Phillips, that not a syllable will go beyond our own circle. But it is so nice to know the real truth about a man of some distinction, as your friend, Dr. Laurence Digby (his name is particularly attractive) undoubtedly is—a man who is about to buy a West-end practice—my friend Mrs. Dalrymple lives near Cadogan Square, she might have occasion to call him in."

"It would only be in case of Dr. Macpherson's death," said Mrs. Dalrymple solemnly. "I make a rule of *never* changing my family doctor."

"Yes, dear, but Dr. Macpherson is over seventy, he cannot last forever; we all know that even doctors are mortal. As the Bible tells us, '*All flesh is grass.*' Now if Mr. Phillips's friend were to settle anywhere near you it would be so nice

to know something about him; it would make you feel so *safe*. Now, Mr. Phillips, you will give us your real opinion of this favorite physician with the romantic name. I am confident you are keeping something back."

"Nothing," said Phillips, "nothing whatever. You ask me if I think Digby clever. I do. As to his rashness——"

"Oh, is he rash?"

"I am wrong to say that—he is daring and brave—he does things that I should hesitate to do, but then I am only a humble dresser. A case occurred only two nights ago at the hospital—a child was ill, and Digby performed an operation. The child did not die, although he was very near dying, but Fairfax, one of our visiting physicians, and my opinion coincides with his—Fairfax, I understand, disapproved of Digby's action. The child escaped with his life, however, so nothing more will be heard of the matter."

"You have not told the truth," said Cecilia suddenly.

All eyes were turned on her. She bent forward in her seat, the color had flown from her cheeks, her eyes were widely dilated.

"I was present when that operation was performed, and you are not telling the truth about it. The child was dying—in ten minutes he would have died. Dr. Digby performed an operation and saved his life."

"Cecilia!" said her aunt, in a voice of ice, "Cecilia, you forget yourself; be silent!"

"I will be silent, Aunt Charlotte, when I have said what I know. Mr. Phillips has given you a false impression of Dr. Digby. He is *not* rash, he is *not* reckless. He can make up his mind quickly, and he can be prompt in action. There is no one more worthy of regard than Dr. Digby. He is the truest and best man I have ever met."

"Bravo, Humpty Dumpty!" came from George in an irrepressible burst from the other end of the table.

A queer flash, half of triumph, half of anger, lit up Phillips's eyes. He turned to Mrs. Lancaster, and said with an ill-concealed sneer:

"I told you that all the ladies admired Digby."

"I must apologize for my niece," said Mrs. Lancaster, "she is a very impulsive girl, and does not mean half she says. Pray forgive her rudeness, Mr. Phillips."

"Granted," said Phillips. "I have had many opportunities of studying the feminine mind, and at St. Christopher's, at

least, I always perceive that it suns itself in Dr. Digby's presence." He paused after this, and then said, bending slightly toward Mrs. Lancaster:

"I thought I knew your niece's face; I have met her several times at St. Christopher's, but, of course, a nurse's dress and cap much alter the general appearance; still, I thought her face was familiar."

"She has been at St. Christopher's exactly a month," said Mrs. Lancaster. "I did not approve of her going as nurse there. She has now returned to me, being declared unfit for the post. Mrs. Dalrymple," turning toward that lady, "shall we go into the drawing room?"

In the course of the evening Phillips made his way to the distant sofa where Cecilia was sitting talking to Helena. He bent over her, and said in so low a tone that the other girl could scarcely hear the words:

"You surprised me at dinner."

"You did not surprise me," answered Cecilia, in a quick retort. "I have often seen you at the hospital, and, although I did not recognize you by your name when my aunt said you were coming to dine, the moment I saw your face I felt that you were the kind of man who would speak as you did of Dr. Digby. It is impossible for a man like you to understand a man like him."

Cecilia's words were not low, and Helena gazed at her cousin in unconcealed amazement.

Phillips flushed the ugly red he had done when Digby reproved him before the medical students. His words, however, were always well under control, and, after a very short moment of silence, he once more bent down and said in a calm and gentle voice:

"Whatever you may feel about me, I must repeat my last observation; your remark at dinner astonished me. I should have thought, from the reports which reached me, that you would feel even more strongly than I do the imprudence of Digby's action on the night in question."

"What do you mean?" asked Cecilia.

"Reports reached me that on that night you accused Digby of positive cruelty. I have never gone that length."

Cecilia's face grew white, her lips trembled. She tried to answer Phillips, but no words came. After a moment she turned to Helena.

"Come to this table with me," she said, "I want to show you something."

Phillips walked away well satisfied.

He did not care to know anything more about Cecilia's sentiments.

"I have tested her," he said to himself; "I have made two experiments on her—she has responded admirably to my touch."

He resumed his conversation with Millie Lancaster, and went away that evening, having charmed everyone in the house with the exception of Cecilia and George.

CHAPTER VIII.

A HAPPY THOUGHT.

GEORGE LANCASTER was Phillips's special friend, but on that evening he bade him a cold good-night, and made up his mind that he was not quite such a delightful fellow as he had hitherto considered him. Lancaster came back to the drawing room to find everyone gone to bed but Cecilia. She had stayed behind ostensibly for the purpose of putting away some books and papers; in reality, because she did not want to go up to her room until her aunt and cousins had shut themselves into theirs. Had Mrs. Lancaster known that George would come back to the drawing room she would certainly have remained up for another hour rather than leave him alone with his cousin just then.

He strolled into the room in the half-reluctant, half-leisurely fashion of a person who is not quite on the best terms with the world. When he saw Cecilia he gave a start of pleasure.

"Hallo, Humpty Dumpty!" he said, "that's right—you haven't gone to bed. Come and sit by the fire, and let's have a talk."

"I can't, George. I am very tired and—and sleepy."

George came round the room, and stood by the table where Cecilia was putting the books in order. He peered forward, and looked into her face.

"I say," he exclaimed, "your eyes are red! What's the matter?"

"Nothing, George; nothing."

"Did that brute of a Phillips hurt you at dinner? I saw you were awfully upset. I admired your pluck. You are just the sort of girl to give Phillips one for himself. I am so glad

you did. I think he is a beastly, conceited sort of sneak—he wants taking down a peg.”

“George!” said Cecilia in astonishment, “I thought Mr. Phillips was your friend.”

“He used to be, but I shall drop him if he sets you crying. Don’t, Humpty, I hate to see your eyes red. I like you awfully, you know. You know that, don’t you, Humpty?”

“You have always been kind to me, George. Now I must go to bed.”

“Well, I wish you wouldn’t. You might talk to a fellow. It’s beastly dull in this house, I can tell you. Mother has such poky ideas about things, and one never sees a pretty face. It’s all right when you are at home, of course—you are pretty enough to please any fellow; but when you are away!”

“I shall soon be away again, George. I am very much obliged to you for being kind, but I must say good-night now.”

She was running out of the room, when George, with a stride or two, overtook her. He caught hold of her hand, and tried to draw her toward him to kiss her.

At this instant Mrs. Lancaster, in her flannel dressing gown, opened the drawing room door and came in.

George, a very well-meaning, good sort of fellow, had not the moral courage to face the situation. He turned and fled, leaving Cecilia to face her angry aunt alone.

“Well, miss,” said Mrs. Lancaster, “what am I to think of you now, Cecilia?”

“You may think what you please, Aunt Charlotte. George is a very good fellow, and he is fond of me in a cousinly way. He tried to kiss me just now and I would not let him. I don’t wish him to kiss me, and I would much rather he were not kind. I am going to my room now, Aunt Charlotte. I am not to blame in any way, but I don’t think you need feel alarmed about George; he is not the least bit in love with me.”

“What a brazen girl you are, Cecilia!”

“Am I? You seem to think all people brazen who speak the truth. May I go to my room now? I have really done nothing to be ashamed of.”

Mrs. Lancaster motioned with her hand to indicate to her niece that she might leave her. The girl ran past her like a flash.

Mrs. Lancaster forgot the special errand which had brought her down to the drawing room. She walked slowly upstairs, revolving many anxious schemes in her mind.

"Why has Providence given me such a thorn in the flesh as Cecilia Harvey?" she mentally soliloquized.

On her way to her own room she was obliged to pass George's door. Her impulse was to open the door and to go into the young man's room, and tell him what she thought of his conduct. But Mrs. Lancaster was too diplomatic to be always guided by her impulses. She resolved, contrary to her inclination, not to say anything to George, but to remove Cecilia from Harford Square on the following morning.

She thought and thought over the matter. It gave her a sleepless night, but at last, with the dawn, an idea came to her. The more she thought of it the more feasible it grew. She resolved to act upon it, and having made up her mind she fell into a comfortable sleep.

Mrs. Lancaster was well known for her charity. She had thought of a scheme in the gray and early hours of the morning, which would not only rid her of Cecilia, but do a substantial kindness to a poor and distant relation. Her good deed could be spoken about to her friends, and would thus add to her own importance. She rose, therefore, in a cheerful frame of mind, and came down to breakfast in an excellent humor. George and Cecilia were present. She was most amiable to them both. George felt immensely grateful to her, and Cecilia had never thought her Aunt Charlotte nicer. She felt quite puzzled at the gentle way in which she was addressed, and began to reproach herself for the unkind thoughts which she had given to this good aunt during the past night.

After breakfast George went away quite happily to his work in the City. He could not help giving a wistful look at Cecilia as he left the room. She did not even see this affectionate glance, but his mother did, and she felt more than ever pleased with herself for having devised that little scheme in the early morning watches.

"I think," said Mrs. Lancaster, addressing her daughters as they were about to leave the room to fetch their work, "that I shall send you three girls out for a good brisk walk to Regent's Park this morning. Millie, you are looking quite pasty, and a walk will be of service to you. You can all start early and have a pleasant time."

"May we ride in an omnibus part of the way, mamma?" asked Chatty.

"My dear Chatty, don't talk nonsense! What are young legs made for? You are all perfectly strong, and the walk

will do you a world of good. Now off with you at once and get ready. Susan," addressing the parlor maid, who came in with a large scuttle of wet coal, "you can slack the fire very well this morning, for we are going out."

"May Cecilia come with us to the park, mamma?" asked Helena, excitement lighting up her eyes.

"No, my dear, no. Cecilia and I are going to have a little expedition on our own account. Lena, follow your sisters. Run away at once, my love. No, no, you are not going to coax our secret out of us."

Cecilia was standing in the enclosure of one of the windows. Her face was pale, her expression lacking in interest.

"I have no secret to tell you, Helena," she said in a listless voice.

"There, my love, you hear what Cecilia says. I have not told her yet of the nice little surprise I have in store for her. Run off at once, Lena, you see I am in earnest."

Helena ran up to Cecilia, kissed her impulsively, and left the room.

A quarter of an hour later the three girls were seen walking across the square on their way to Regent's Park.

Mrs. Lancaster went over to the window to see them depart; then she turned to her niece.

"Now, Cecilia," she said, "I mean to take you out with me. Run upstairs at once, my dear, and put on your hat and cloak."

Cecilia obeyed without a word.

When she entered her attic the first object that met her eye was her own modest trunk strapped and locked. One of the housemaids was just leaving the room.

"What is the meaning of this?" she said, pointing to her trunk.

"I have just packed it, Miss Harvey. Missis gave orders through Hannah. She says 'Tell Jane to pack Miss Harvey's trunk and strap it.' I don't think I has left out anything, Miss; all the drawers is empty. Why, Miss, you do look queer. I hasn't done nothing wrong, has I? Them was missis's most positive orders."

"Oh no, Jane; you have done quite right," said Cecilia. "I was only a little star——" She checked herself. "It's *quite* right, Jane," she said, holding out her hand to the girl. "Shake hands and say good-by. I'd give you a shilling if I had the money."

Jane wiped her hand on her apron before she held it out.

"Oh, Miss," she said, "as if I'd take your money; I do like you, Miss Cecilia, and I'm really sorry as you're going, and I wouldn't touch your money, Miss, for you hasn't none too much. They do say things in the kitchen, and we all know what's in missis's mind. But I do like you, Miss, and I'm sorry you're going away. Good-by, Miss Cecilia."

Jane left the room. Cecilia put on her hat and cloak, took up her gloves and umbrella, and ran downstairs.

Mrs. Lancaster was standing in the hall. A cab was at the door, and Cecilia's small trunk was on the roof.

The two ladies got into the cab and drove away. Mrs. Lancaster felt sure that her niece would ask her innumerable questions, but Cecilia did not make a single inquiry.

She sat perfectly still by her aunt's side, and her young face wore a rather stony expression.

The cab rattled and lumbered along, and at last brought its occupants to King's Cross terminus. Mrs. Lancaster haggled with the cabman about his fare, but in the end was forced to pay what he asked. She then took a second-class return ticket for herself to Highgate, and a second-class single one for Cecilia.

The train came up, and the aunt and niece got into a second class compartment. They were alone in the carriage, and again Mrs. Lancaster looked at Cecilia, expecting her and wishing her to speak.

Cecilia had seated herself by one of the windows. She kept looking steadily out, and Mrs. Lancaster could only get a glimpse of her delicate and rather pretty profile.

At last the elder lady felt her patience exhausted.

"Cecilia," she said, "have you nothing to say to me?"

Cecilia turned slowly and spoke in a calm tone.

"I don't think I have, Aunt Charlotte. At least I have nothing special to talk about at this moment."

"Don't you wonder where we are going?"

"No."

Mrs. Lancaster felt as if she could shake her niece.

"You are a most exasperating girl," she said. "You know perfectly well that you are dying to know why I am taking you to Highgate."

"I am not. I am not sufficiently interested to have my curiosity aroused, but if you wish me to ask you questions I will do so. *Why* are you taking me to Highgate?"

"Ah! now you are sensible. I am taking you to a friend of mine—a Miss Timmins."

"Timmins? I never heard of her."

"Well, you hear of her now; she will give you a home for the present."

"Oh; I don't want to live with Miss Timmins."

"You must sometimes do what you don't want to do. It is not convenient to have you in Harford Square any longer."

"I know that, Aunt Charlotte."

"So you are coming to stay with Miss Timmins."

Cecilia again turned to look out of the window. After a time she asked, still keeping her face away:

"Does Miss Timmins expect us, Aunt Charlotte?"

"She does not."

"But you are bringing my trunk."

"It is all right; I know how to arrange matters. Here we are; you can get out."

Cecilia and her aunt both alighted on the platform of the country station, and a few minutes later both ladies found themselves walking down a narrow lane that led to Miss Timmins's house.

It was a very tiny house to be led to, even by an unsophisticated country lane. It stood a few feet back from the road, and had a small old-fashioned garden in front.

Mrs. Lancaster pulled the bell at the gate, and presently the green hall door was opened, and a thin, reed-like old woman, wearing a cap of rusty black, came out.

She gave a great start, and turned first pale and then red when she saw Mrs. Lancaster.

"Yes, my dear," exclaimed the good lady, in her fullest and most unctuous voice, "it is really me. I have come to pay you a little visit, and I have brought my niece with me, Cecilia Harvey. May we come in?"

"Certainly, certainly!" exclaimed Miss Timmins.

She tripped down the path to unlock the gate, and Cecilia had time to observe that she had holes in her stockings, and that her list house slippers were broken at the toes. She also noticed that Miss Timmins wore a very dirty dress, and that her hands looked like those of a housemaid who wore no gloves when she polished the grates.

Notwithstanding her decidedly seedy appearance Mrs. Lancaster was very affectionate to Miss Timmins. She called her Abigail, and inquired for her cough.

"It racks me and hacks me as much as usual," replied Miss Timmins, "but it isn't worth inquiring about, for I have had it now for over thirty years, and I am accustomed to it. Will you come into the kitchen, Charlotte, there's no fire in the parlor?"

Mrs. Lancaster replied amiably that she would be very pleased to sit with Miss Timmins in the kitchen, but that she would be equally glad if her niece, Cecilia Harvey, could be accommodated with a chair in the parlor, as she wanted to have a little conversation of a private character with her friend.

Miss Timmins's parlor had the musty smell of a room that is never used. There was a table in the middle, on which reposed a huge photographic album on a wool mat. In the center of the table was another wool mat, on which a glass case with wax flowers stood. There were six chairs in the parlor, which were all placed modestly against the wall; short, green moreen curtains festooned the windows, a carpet made of faded Kidderminster covered the floor, and a great thick rug, which Miss Timmins must have knitted out of bits of cloth cut in strips, stood before the empty grate. The walls of the room were covered with a paper of a very large pattern, and the mantelpiece was adorned with three more cases of wax flowers reposing on wool mats.

Over the mantelpiece was a framed sampler, which recorded that Abigail Timmins had executed this finished piece of art when she was eleven years, five months, and a fortnight old.

Cecilia had the pleasure of standing in this dreary parlor for the best part of an hour. During that time she examined every article of furniture in the room, looked at all the photographs in the album, and finally occupied her mind with a sum of mental arithmetic regarding Miss Timmins's present age.

As the date of the year in which the sampler was finished was recorded on it in very neat sampler stitch, she was able to arrive at the conclusion that Miss Timmins would have a birthday in one week, and that she would then be fifty-eight years of age.

Cecilia had just finished her sum when her aunt came in and spoke to her.

"Good-by, my love," she said. "I trust you will be very happy here. You must write to me, Cecilia, if you want anything, only please understand that I don't wish you to come to see me."

"But, Aunt Charlotte, Aunt Charlotte——"

"I can't wait, my dear Cecilia, I have only just time to catch my train. One of the porters will bring up your trunk presently. Good-by."

CHAPTER IX.

AN IMPULSIVE INMATE.

CECILIA turned round slowly, to see Miss Abigail Timmins gazing at her with a wistful expression. The moment Cecilia saw that look on the old lady's face her heart softened; she went up to her in her impulsive fashion and took her hand.

"Do you want me to stay with you?" she asked.

"Well, my dear," said Miss Timmins, "it's Charlotte Lancaster's wish. There never was a more remarkable woman than Charlotte; it is her wish, and she always carries out her wishes, so you and I have got to submit, my dear."

"I am truly sorry for you," said Cecilia.

"Thank you," replied Miss Timmins; "I frankly admit that it is a heavy trial. My house is very small, and I have only one bedroom. Do you mind sleeping in my room, dear Miss Cecilia Harvey?"

"I think," said Cecilia, "that it would be a much better arrangement if you allowed me to sleep on the sofa in this nice parlor."

"Oh!" said Miss Timmins with a shudder, "I never did think that I should come to such a depth of degradation as to turn my parlor into a bedroom."

"But I should only just sleep here," continued Cecilia eagerly, "and I would take away all the bedclothes before you got up in the morning. No one could know anything about it. I think," she continued, "that it would do the parlor good, for it smells very damp and musty."

"Do you think so?" said Miss Timmins. She looked around her anxiously. "I light a fire here always *once* during the winter," she said; "the room ought not to smell musty; you make me very anxious, my dear."

"Oh, pray don't mind what I say; the musty smell may be my fancy. Suppose, to make all things sure, however, that we light two fires in your parlor this winter, and the second fire shall be in my honor. May we have a second fire to-day, Miss Timmins?"

Miss Timmins began to count slowly on her fingers.

"Wait awhile," she said, "I must put the expense down on a slate. I am to get so much per day for you, and I must find out, before I commit any extravagances, if the profits of having you in the house will admit of having an extra fire in the parlor to-day."

The old lady left the room, and Cecilia, rubbing her eyes once or twice to make quite sure that she was not dreaming, stood and looked out of the tiny lattice window.

It was winter, but the lane outside was adorned with holly bushes and various other evergreens.

"While Miss Timmins is calculating whether she can give me a fire or not, I shall go out for a walk," she said to herself. She opened the parlor door and stepped across the narrow passage to the little kitchen, where the old lady was bending with puckered brows over a slate.

"I know you have got a shock," said Cecilia, "and, as I said before, I am truly sorry for you. But please don't be too unhappy, for I am very easily pleased, and after awhile you will get accustomed to me, and perhaps you will not find me such a bad sort of girl as Aunt Charlotte has given you to understand I am. Oh, you need not speak; I know Aunt Charlotte's opinions about me perfectly well. I am going for a walk now; I shall be out for an hour or two, but do not be a bit anxious, I shall come back just about the time when you have recovered from the shock of having to take me in."

Miss Timmins looked nervously at the eight-day clock which ticked in a corner of her small kitchen.

"As a rule, I dine at one," she said, "but your coming has upset my dinner preparations. If you go for a walk now, my dear Miss Harvey, what are you to do for dinner? I cannot offer you any before you start."

"We won't have dinner to-day," said Cecilia, "we will have high tea instead."

"High tea?" questioned Miss Timmins.

"Yes," continued Cecilia, with a sparkle in her eyes, "quite a delicious high tea; and while we are eating it I will tell you about some of the things that happened when I was nurse at St. Christopher's. You don't know what an entertaining girl I can be when I please. I am going out now, and I don't wish for dinner."

Cecilia felt a brief passing desire to offer Miss Timmins a

kiss, but on reflection she resolved not to become so affectionate until she had induced the old lady to wash her hands and face very thoroughly.

She went out, shutting the small green hall door behind her.

Twenty years ago the beautiful suburb of Highgate was really a country place. Cecilia loved the country, and notwithstanding the perplexities and irritations of her present lot, she thoroughly enjoyed her walk. She left the narrow, winding lane, in which Miss Timmins's house stood, far behind her, and walked up a shady road that took her to the top of Highgate Hill. She had a lovely view from there, which she much enjoyed gazing at. Her spirits rose as she walked. After all it was much more interesting to live with poor old Miss Timmins than with Aunt Charlotte and George and her three girl cousins. She made up her mind to be contented with her lot for at least a day or two.

"I feel quite sure that I can consult Miss Timmins about my future," she said to herself; "a woman who, at eleven years, five months, and a fortnight, could have worked such a splendid sampler as I saw framed in the parlor must be a person of vast experience. I noticed by Miss Timmins's hands, too, that she is not afraid of hard work. I am not afraid of hard work, either; I should not fear to turn to anything that I felt I could do. Of course, if my lot in life is to clean grates I shall stipulate for gloves; and I am sure I can afford to tie an apron over my hair to keep the dust away when I am sweeping a room."

Cecilia was out very nearly two hours. On her return home she passed some shops. These shops brought to her recollection the high tea she proposed to eat with Miss Timmins that evening. As she had not tasted food since the early and not too liberal breakfast at Harford Square, she was now thoroughly hungry. She put her hand into her pocket, and took out her purse. There was very little money in Cecilia's purse. A ten-shilling piece, a half crown, a shilling, and three halfpence, represented her worldly all. She resolved, however, that, come what might, she and Miss Timmins should fare well that evening. She had spoken of high tea, and she herself would be responsible for its appearance on Miss Timmins's board.

On her walk home she made some judicious purchases. First of all she visited a dairy, where she bought a quarter of a pound of the best butter and threepennyworth of cream.

The woman who served in the dairy was attracted by Cecilia's face, and, although she certainly knew nothing about her, did not scruple to lend her a tiny can to hold the cream. In another shop she purchased a loaf of new bread and some fresh, tempting looking scones. A little further on she saw a basket in a window containing brown eggs, labeled "New Laid." They were twopence apiece, but Cecilia went to the extravagance of buying four. Finally, she purchased a quarter of a pound of tea and a pound of loaf sugar, and, well laden, she returned to the cottage in Green Lane.

Miss Timmins opened the door the very instant Cecilia rang the bell. She looked much less limp than she had done when Mrs. Lancaster arrived that morning; her sunken eyes were bright, and she had evidently made a valiant attempt to tidy her person, for her hair was pushed smoothly back under her rusty cap, her face was clean, and her poor, worn hands were partly hidden by black lace mittens.

"Oh, you dear!" said Cecilia. She went straight up to the old lady and kissed her. "Miss Timmins, you look quite sweet. Now do see all these things I have brought in. These are new laid eggs; this parcel contains groceries; here are nice, fresh scones; and this little jug contains cream; and see! I haven't forgotten some really good butter!"

"My dear," said Miss Timmins, turning pale, "but where did you get the money? Your Aunt Charlotte would be absolutely shocked."

"Hurrah!" said Cecilia. "There is nothing in the world I should love so much as to shock Aunt Charlotte."

Miss Timmins tried to look stern, but a twinkle came into one of her eyes, and Cecilia perceived it.

"My dear," she said gravely, "you do wrong to speak in that reckless fashion, and you acted imprudently in spending your small money on this—this lavish feast. It is impossible for me to pay you back for it, my dear child. Your aunt—I will say it in confidence—makes a very modest allowance for your keeping here."

"I have no doubt of it," said Cecilia; "but we will talk of all that presently. Wrong or right, I am going to enjoy my tea. May I take my hat and cloak off? and then may I come to the kitchen and get it ready? You are to sit in a chair and watch me while I prepare the meal."

"I could not do that," replied Miss Timmins. "I permit no one to interfere with my domestic arrangements."

"But you look so tired, and I am young and fresh and strong."

"You look very young and fresh and bonny," said Miss Timmins, "but, even so, I am not going to allow my work to be taken from me. I see that you are a kind-hearted girl, and it isn't your fault that you have been sent where you are not wanted. It is very good natured of you to buy this excellent food out of your own money, and I do not pretend that I am not glad to have it. My own income is very limited, and cream in my tea and new laid eggs are luxuries which I used to have long ago, but not lately, my dear—not at all lately. I will prepare the tea myself, Miss Harvey, but as you have brought in the things and spent so much on them they will really last a very long time. [Cecilia gasped inwardly when this remark was made.] I will do what lies in my power to please you. You are doubtless not accustomed to sitting in the kitchen. We will have a fire in the parlor to-night, and have tea there."

"Oh, thank you," said Cecilia, "but I love kitchens. I would much rather sit in your nice kitchen for my tea."

"Would you, really and truly?"

"Really and truly I would."

"Well, then, let it be so; but you shall have a fire in the parlor all the same when we have finished our meal."

The only drawback to that high tea was Miss Timmins's desire to put by all the food until the next day. Cecilia, however, saw that this was an occasion when firmness would be necessary.

"I am starving," she said, "and you can't prevent my wishing to eat the food I bought with my own money." So the three scones were toasted, and the new laid eggs were boiled, and the tea in the little teapot was not too weak, and Cecilia would help herself to as much of her own fresh butter as she wished to eat.

Miss Timmins grew pale, and sighed every time her guest placed a fresh bit of food upon her plate, but presently the influence of a cheerful fire and a cheerful young face, and the abundant food that graced the board, had the effect of thawing the wintry heart of poor Miss Abigail Timmins, and she leant back in her chair and really enjoyed herself when Cecilia told her stories about the hospital.

"I will not ask her to give me any of her experiences of life to-night," thought the young girl. "I shall have to stay with

her a day or two, and there will be time enough to learn her experience to-morrow or the day after. To-night I shall just devote myself to amusing her. Poor thing! how she coughs, and how thin she is, and how awfully afraid that I shall break something each time I move! Poor Miss Timmins, she is really very ill! She is the kind of woman who would be given any amount of nourishment if she came to St. Christopher's. I know she half starves herself—she has starved herself so long that she has ceased to be very hungry. Oh, dear! I am very sorry for her! I should like to make her life a little brighter."

The fire in the parlor was not large, for Miss Timmins was as prudent with regard to coal as she was about all other matters; nor was the sofa a soft bed, nor were the bedclothes which covered it at all abundant—nevertheless, Cecilia, young, strong, and interested in the queer new phase life was presenting to her, laid her head on the horsehair sofa, and in a moment or two was in the land of dreams.

She was awakened presently by the terrible sound of a person coughing and gasping violently.

Miss Timmins slept in the room overhead, and the cough proceeded from her throat.

"Oh, poor thing!" thought Cecilia, "she ought to have some one with her. I do believe she'll choke. Now, what would they do at St. Christopher's for a woman who coughs as badly as that? I think they would give her a hot drink. I will get up—I will go into the kitchen and warm some tea and take it up to her."

Cecilia rose at once and struck a light. She opened the door of the parlor, and went across the passage to the kitchen. To her disappointment she found that the door was locked. She stood still and considered. She had no means of warming a drink for Miss Timmins in the parlor, for the little fire had long ago expired. She stood in the passage listening. The sounds of coughing had ceased. The next moment a door upstairs was opened, and a hoarse and angry voice called out:

"Who's there?"

"It's only me," said Cecilia, "you were coughing so badly that I wanted to warm a drink to bring up to you."

"Now you will just do nothing of the kind, Miss Harvey," replied Miss Timmins, in a decidedly annoyed voice. "I have stipulated to take care of you and feed you, and amuse you to the best of my ability during the waking hours,

but I will not be worried by you at night. As to my cough——”

“You have an awful cough,” responded Cecilia from below.

“Awful—do you call that cough awful? I have gasped and choked and barked for the last thirty years. Go back to bed, child, and don’t be silly; much you know about a cough. I am used to mine, and it isn’t worth anybody’s while to worry about a trifle of that sort. Go back to bed, Miss Harvey.”

Cecilia did creep back to her hard bed. She felt repulsed; a cold chill crept over her heart.

“No one seems to want me to be kind to them,” she thought, as she cuddled down under the bedclothes and tried to sleep.

CHAPTER X.

BEELZEBUB.

DIGBY was the sort of man who never forgot a promise. Accordingly, poor dying Number Forty-eight in the woman’s ward was almost startled back into fresh life and vigor when the doctor, after completing one of his rounds, came back and bent over her. He began a low conversation in a very kind voice.

Number Forty-nine in the next bed never in the whole course of her existence felt such a consuming sense of curiosity as during the brief moments that Dr. Digby spoke to Mrs. Murray. Strain her ears, however, as she would, not one word of the doctor’s low tones, or the faint broken whispers that came in reply, reached her ears.

Digby took Mrs. Murray’s hand when he bade her good-by.

“God bless you!” he said in a deep tone, and then he strode down the room, looking neither to right nor left.

“What is it? Do tell me what the doctor wanted with you, Mrs. Murray?” asked inquisitive Number Forty-nine.

But Number Forty-eight was even now too far under the influence of the Shadowy Presence which men call Death to make any audible answer; her dim eyes could scarcely see, and her dying voice could scarcely be heard.

The nurse who bent over her, however, caught a few words.

“Eh, but he’s a good man, that doctor, bless him, bless him! And she’s a sweet young lady May Heaven reward her!”

The nurse could not help wondering who Number Forty-eight meant by the "sweet young lady." It did not occur to her to suppose that the reference was to the useless probationer, Nurse Harvey.

In the course of the afternoon Mrs. Murray died, but Digby had got all that Cecilia wanted to know faithfully recorded in his notebook.

The hospital was crowded just then. Every bed was full, and the house physician was very busy.

The medical students were having a specially valuable training, for the diseases under which many of the patients suffered were various and interesting.

Phillips in particular seemed now to wake up, and take, for the first time, the keenest interest in his work. It was impossible for Digby to complain again of Phillips as wanting in zeal with regard to the cases under discussion.

He felt, however, even less drawn than ever to the man. The dresser had not again ventured on making any openly slighting remark to his superior, but covert sneers were not wanting, and Digby felt that for some extraordinary reason Phillips hated him.

It is easy in a great hospital to set rumors, good and bad, afloat. Rumors can arise and do much mischief without anyone tracing them to their foundation.

Tommy Constantine was nearly well again. Digby, by his promptitude, had saved his life, and the little fellow was to be sent to a convalescent home as soon as he could be moved. Still, the small incident which occurred when Digby performed the operation was not forgotten, and was common talk even yet among the medical students.

It was easy for Phillips, who was tolerably popular among a certain set, to give vital interest to all this gossip by dropping a few hints with regard to Cecilia. He mentioned casually the circumstance of having met her leaving the doctor's room, and he hinted in quite sufficiently plain language that the pretty probationer had secured a very tender place in Digby's regard.

One evening the jokes on this subject became so unnecessarily disagreeable, that a young student of the name of Osborne said abruptly:

"I shall listen to this sort of thing no longer; Digby is the best fellow in the world. He has a perfect right to admire Miss Harvey if he pleases. From all I can learn she is a

very nice girl and a lady. I shall just go and tell Digby what you say, for I see plainly there is nothing else to be done in order to stop these idle and false rumors."

"Nonsense, Osborne! for goodness' sake, let the matter drop!" exclaimed one or two.

"No," replied Osborne, "this kind of talk has gone on too long; I know well who's at the bottom of it, and Digby himself must refute the charges hinted against him."

Osborne strode away at once, and a moment later was knocking at the house physician's door.

"May I come in?" he called out, opening the door an inch or two as he spoke.

"I am particularly engaged, but if you really want me—— Oh, is that you, Osborne? Come in, come in; you understand me well enough when I say I am much pressed for time at this moment."

"I won't keep you, Digby. I just want to put a plain question to you. Do you mind?"

"Mind?" answered Digby. He laughed pleasantly, and, going up to Osborne, put his hand on his shoulder.

"No," he said affectionately, for this medical student was a particular friend of his. "You may say what you please if you are only brief. But what a perturbed expression of face. Is anything up?"

"It's only about you. They talk such a heap of rot in the smoking room. The thing has been going on now for days; and I'm quite sure Phillips is at the bottom of it, though he's too much of a sneak to show up and reveal his true colors. Matters were so bad to-night that I could really bear it no longer, so I said I would come and tell you."

"Yes, yes, you always were a true friend, Osborne; but don't excite yourself; I can assure you I am indifferent to the trash you young fellows talk among yourselves."

"You ought not to be indifferent to this—you can't be, for a girl's name is dragged in."

"A girl! Good Heavens, what do you mean! What girl?" Digby grew red.

"Well, it's that pretty probationer—that Miss Harvey, who was not successful as nurse. You must remember her; she fainted when you were performing an operation, and then she left the house the next day."

"I remember her," replied Digby in a stern voice. "What

can anyone have to say about her and me? We are the merest acquaintances."

"I can't tell you what is said; the words in themselves are not worth repeating; it is more the tones, the looks, and oh, Digby! the jokes."

Digby suddenly grasped Osborne by the shoulder.

"Look at me," he said; "you don't mean to say to my face that they couple my name with Miss Harvey's?"

"They have done so for the last week or two; even the nurses have hinted about it—at least, so I am told. They say you always took an interest in her. Oh, of course, it is all Phillips's doing. He saw her coming from your room one evening after she had left the hospital, and then afterward he met her at a house where he was dining, and, as he said, the devil of mischief got into him, and he drew her on to stand up for you. She made rather a spectacle of herself before everyone at the table, and from what we gather told Phillips some home truths. He has made great capital out of that scene, of course hiding his own discomfiture. I have been told all this by one or two fellows, but now that the ball is well set rolling Phillips has sneaked into the background and doesn't say a word. For all his bullying ways he wouldn't like to feel the force of your anger."

"The brute!" retorted Digby. He turned on his heel, walked to the window, drew up the blind, and looked out.

"The gossip was so bad to-night," continued Osborne, "that I could bear it no longer, and I said if there was a word of truth in the story there was only one simple and broad explanation. If you really took an interest in Miss Harvey, and singled her out for special attention, it was because you liked her, and were probably engaged to her. I said I would go and ask you this pointblank."

"You did?" said Digby, wheeling round and looking at him. "You said we were engaged—she and I? You thought that would get her out of this beastly hole?"

"Why, yes, Digby. How can you doubt it?"

"By Jove!" retorted Digby, with an awkward laugh. "It would not have occurred to me, but you are a cleverer fellow than I thought you were."

"Then you are engaged?" said Osborne, flushing with pleasure. "Let me congratulate you. You give me leave to tell all those fellows, don't you?"

"I give you leave to do nothing of the kind. I shall prob-

ably see the men in the smoking room to-morrow evening, and you may rest assured that I shall take measures to effectually silence this gossip. Thank you for coming to me, but go now, please, for I must get on with my work."

Osborne felt as if an imperative hand had actually swept him out of the room. The door was immediately locked behind him.

When he found himself alone, the house physician walked across the room to a table strewn with medical books and papers. At one end of the table was a long drawer. He pulled it open, and swept books and papers into it in hopeless confusion.

"There goes my chance of solving that problem!" he muttered, as he turned the key in the lock and then placed it in his pocket. When he had done this, he walked up and down the room two or three times, and, going to the window, stared once more with an abstracted gaze into the night.

There was not the least doubt that he felt very angry. There was a reserve about him which shrank from having his private affairs even lightly touched upon by his friends; but to be the subject of idle jest and ugly rumor, to have his name coupled with that of an innocent girl and made common property of the smoking room, brought a thundercloud to his brow.

The remark Phillips had made about Digby at the Lancasters' dinner party was true. There was no real mystery in the past life of the man, out he lived in such a way, with such impenetrable reserve with regard to his early life, that people were fond of alluding to what did not exist. He was an open-hearted, genial, and communicative man where present and everyday affairs were concerned, but a sealed book when old times were mentioned. No one at the hospital knew anything of Digby's old times. It was known that he had been to Cambridge, but his Cambridge chums never came to St. Christopher's. No one was quite sure about his age; no one could exactly tell whether he was rich or poor. It was generally believed that he was without relations, for none ever called to see him, and, as far as it was known, he had no correspondence of a private or domestic character.

Digby liked to feel that no one could gossip about him. He prided himself on the fact that his present life was all-sufficient in itself, that his doings and sayings were as open as the day, that even his worst enemies could say nothing behind

his back that they would not say to his face. He was a man of scrupulous honor, and would not hurt a woman even in thought. To be rumored about, therefore, to be tattled over, to have his name coupled with that of an innocent girl, gave him torture.

"That fellow has raised the devil in me," he said to himself. "I did not know I could feel like this. Of course, I could go to the smoking room and put an end to the whole affair with a word or two. My own emphatic denial would kill the thing as far as I am concerned—but what about the girl? It is a sin for even a breath to touch a girl's name; and this girl— He stopped in his eager walk, and pushed back his hair. "She is just the sort to be affected by it," he said, half aloud. "She is defenseless, poor, and of gentle birth. Her people ought never to have allowed her to come to a place of this sort. But then, has she any people? She told me that she was practically without a home, and that she had no money. Yes, a report of this kind might undoubtedly do her much injury. It might ruin her if it was known." Digby paced faster and faster up and down his small room.

"So much for the world," he said aloud. "It is quite as bad as the pessimists make it. That poor girl—so defenseless, unsuspecting, guileless. Of course, I felt angry with her when she made a fool of herself by Tommy Constantine's bedside, but I was not angry when she came to see me the next morning. Her face was pathetic, her eyes were full of sorrow. She looked almost like a baby when she asked if she might not try again, if she might not once again perform her task, forsooth! as if she was only meddling with a lesson book instead of jeopardizing the lives of human beings. I had to be brutal, of course, but I quite shrank into myself when I saw how she turned away and how pale she grew. Then, fool that I was, I asked her to come and see me here. I should not have done that. I should have remembered that devils in human shape like Phillips might be about, and that they would see her. When did the wolf ever spy out the lamb and not make capital out of it to his own advantage, just as this sneaking coward has done?

"Poor girl, she came to me quite innocently and gladly. How surprised she looked when I almost expressed dissatisfaction at seeing her. I do not think in all my experience I ever came across a more unsuspecting and guileless nature. She reminded me of my sister Winifred, too—the same eyes,

the same curving lips. She had that straight way of looking full at you that Winifred had. She certainly had the courage of her convictions in her face.

“Now, forsooth, her name is coupled with mine, and those medical students think badly of her, and they say things they would kill any man for saying of their own sisters.

“It is too ridiculous to drag me into it—I scarcely know the girl, and yet in some way I am to blame. I should not have asked her to come and see me at the hospital when she was no longer nurse. I should have recognized her gentle birth and her ladyhood beneath her nurse’s dress; it was unwarrantable of me to forget the fact, even though I was surrounded by the out-patients and she came to me with her request at a most unreasonable hour. Poor girl, when she did come I ought to have gone home with her, but I was startled by the sudden look she gave me. It seemed to me as if my sister Winifred had come back to life and had entered my room. It was with difficulty that I could keep from laying my hand on her shoulder and saying, ‘Winifred, your brother has missed you; his heart has been empty since you went away.’ I was overcome; it was absurd—I turned my back. When I looked again she was gone, and it was too late for me to follow her. Well, I suppose this matter will settle itself somehow, but I never felt in such a rage in all my life. I will go and see Miss Harvey to-morrow. I have got her address, and I have a message to take to her from that poor woman, Murray, who died to-day. As to acting on Osborne’s suggestion, why even if I could think of it the girl would not look at me. Well, I will go and see her anyhow; that is but fair, and I promised her I would—at least, I said I’d write. Seeing a person is always more satisfactory than writing. A little conversation clears up many fogs.

“Yes, it was undoubtedly my fault. I should not have asked Miss Harvey to come and see me. I might have recollected the sort of fellows half these medical students are. I should like to go into the smoking room and thunder some of my wrath over their devoted heads! Well, when all is said and done, I am *not* blameless; I should have seen that girl home when she did come, and then perhaps that rumor of the devil might never have been started.

“As it is——”

CHAPTER XI.

A CONVENIENT EAVESDROPPER.

WHEN a man who all his life has been remarkable for quick decision comes to a place in his career where two paths meet he is very often overcome by a strong sense of irritation. He wishes to act quickly and promptly, as his custom is, but many voices rise up in argument within him, and the sense of being completely puzzled reduces him, for the time being, to a condition which is almost helpless.

Digby spent a miserable night. He went to sleep, it is true, but in his sleep he had dreams—his dreams always centered round Cecilia. He saw her in different positions, under different circumstances, now happy, now miserable, but in every case, under every guise, her eyes were full of his sister Winifred's expression, and the thought of his sister was never absent from Digby's mind as he dreamed of the young girl, who, until a few weeks before, had been a complete stranger to him.

Phillips, too, came into the doctor's dreams, and while he walked through dreamland in his company he had undoubtedly an ugly time. In short, Digby had to confess to himself that his night had been unrefreshing; he awoke in the morning still pressed with a sense of indecision, but resolved upon one thing—that he would see Cecilia that day.

This one resolve brought back his accustomed firmness of manner. As he went his rounds through the wards no one noticed any difference in the house physician. One or two nurses looked at him a little curiously, for Phillips's reports had penetrated upstairs as well as downstairs—they had even reached Sister Monica's ears, and, in consequence, her manner was so cold that Digby wondered at it, without in the least attributing it to its true cause.

Immediately after his morning rounds, he made arrangements for someone else to take his work during the afternoon. He was thus a free man, and could go and pay Cecilia a visit with an easy conscience.

He had Mrs. Murray's message to take to her. Nothing could be more natural than that he should take the message himself instead of sending it through the post.

He hunted up the address the ex-probationer had given him, found it accurately entered in his notebook, and then started off for Harford Square.

He arrived about three o'clock. The days were very short then, for it was drawing toward Christmas, and the light was dim in the square when Digby mounted the steps of the great house and pulled the door-bell.

It was opened by a neatly dressed parlor maid. In answer to his inquiries she replied that Miss Harvey was not at present living at No. 50. This reply checked the doctor, and brought back the new and painful sense of indecision which was clouding his mind. Should he go back to St. Christopher's and give Cecilia up, or should he make further inquiries with regard to her? In a voice which slightly hesitated he acted on the latter course.

"Can you give me Miss Harvey's address?" he said. "I have a special message which I wish to convey to her."

"Will you step inside, sir?" responded the maid. "I will run upstairs and inquire of my mistress."

Digby was shown into the dining room, and in a moment or two the girl who had taken up his card to Mrs. Lancaster returned with the request that he would come up to the drawing room and see the good lady.

Mrs. Lancaster was alone; she received Laurence Digby with marked cordiality. The moment she saw his name on the little piece of pasteboard which the servant presented to her, she recognized the name as that of the man whom Phillips had maligned at her dinner party. This fact, however, by no means decreased Mrs. Lancaster's interest in the popular physician of St. Christopher's. She felt just in that lonely and not too healthy condition when the mere fact of having a doctor—any doctor—in the house was comforting. She was very cordial, therefore, to Digby. She made him sit in a comfortable chair near the fire, and ordered the servant to bring up tea at once.

"I must apologize for coming in," he said, "but I have a message for Miss Harvey, and she gave your house as her address."

"Poor child!" said Mrs. Lancaster, with a sigh.

When she did this, Digby raised his rather short-sighted eyes and gave her a quick glance. He read the insincerity in her tone, and determined to make his visit very brief.

"I will not detain you a moment," he said, "if you will favor me with your niece's present address."

"There is not the least hurry," said Mrs. Lancaster. "I am quite at leisure, and I could not think of letting you go, Dr.

Digby, without giving you a cup of tea. Did you say it was too early for tea?" The doctor had not opened his lips. "We have it at any time these dark afternoons. Perhaps, as a doctor, you disapprove of tea?"

"Not at all; I think tea necessary for women," said Digby brusquely.

Mrs. Lancaster smiled.

"This Laurence Digby is a dear, delightful bear," she said, under her breath. "I see he could be fearfully rude if he liked, but I do appreciate sincere men."

"Now, Dr. Digby," she said aloud, "you shall have your tea, which I maintain is equally good for men and women; I will tell you about my niece Cecilia, and then you shall go if you like."

The doctor bowed.

"I want Miss Harvey's present address," he said.

"She is at Highgate with a very old friend of mine. I cannot tell you quite how long she will remain there; she—she is a difficult girl to manage."

"Indeed!" answered Digby, in an abstracted voice.

"A very difficult girl to manage," pursued Mrs. Lancaster, with emphasis. "You had some experience of her whims at the hospital."

"I had, madam. I found your niece rather too abundantly supplied with those attributes which makes the charm of a home."

"Now what does he mean?" queried Mrs. Lancaster to herself. "I should think, on the whole, he liked Cecilia; and she evidently likes him. Can I forget her face when she stood up for him the day Mr. Phillips dined? What could be more admirable than to bring about a match between my niece and this doctor? What a weight off my mind! No one could then accuse me of having failed in doing my duty to Cecilia."

While these thoughts swept like a flash through Mrs. Lancaster's active brain, she became almost fussy in her attention to Digby. He earnestly wished himself away, and determined to take the first opportunity of saying good-by, if only that tiresome woman would favor him with the address he wanted and let him go.

The servant appeared with the tea, and Digby, who hated tea in the afternoon, was forced to drink a rather watery cup of this beverage. He rose at last to his feet.

"You will give me Miss Harvey's address?" he said. "I

promised to write and tell her something with regard to one of her poor patients in the hospital."

"So kind of you, Dr. Digby. Few men living the busy life you do would care to humor the whims of a romantic girl like my niece. Yes—I——"

"Will you let me have Miss Harvey's address, Mrs. Lancaster?"

Now this was the very last thing Mrs. Lancaster intended to do; she had not the smallest desire that Digby should see for himself the home where Cecilia was at present residing.

Such a house and such a person as Miss Abigail Timmins would certainly have a prejudicial effect on the doctor, and might turn away that very palpable interest which he at present took in the fortunes of her niece. No; if Digby really liked her he must meet her at her aunt's house, properly dressed like any other young lady, and regarded on all hands as a privileged member of an affectionate family.

Digby's directness, therefore, was very embarrassing, and Mrs. Lancaster could not help hesitating and thus driving the doctor into a state of inward frenzy. "My niece," she said, "has only gone for a very short visit; she will be back here again in a day or two. Would you not like to meet her here? I should be so pleased if you would take us quite informally and come to dinner some evening. We are a very domestic family, and are only too glad to see any of our friends at any time. I am gratified at your interest in my niece, Dr. Digby. She is a most sweet, affectionate, and amiable girl, but she had her faults, and her future career troubles me not a little. The poor child has no parents, and she has a very restless spirit. Nothing will induce her to live quietly here. Even now she is devising wild schemes for going out into the world to earn her living. You, who know her slightly, can judge for yourself how fitted she is for a life of roughing."

"Not fitted at all," said Digby. "A delicate organism, highly strung nerves."

"Yes, yes; you doctors can grasp the true situation in a moment. It is delightful to hear you. You have thrown light on Cecilia's character. But, poor child, she is obstinate."

"I am sorry," interrupted Digby; "I fear I cannot remain another moment. If you will give me Miss Harvey's address I will write to her and deliver the message intrusted to me for her. About dining here? Thanks, I never dine out."

"I am so sorry; my son and daughters would have been glad to make your acquaintance. If you will write to Cecilia and send your letter to *me*, I will forward it to her. The old friend with whom she is now staying never cares to receive visitors, and I could not, without her permission, ask you to call on my niece at Highgate."

The doctor bowed. "Thank you," he replied. "I am sorry to have troubled you."

The next moment he was standing in the hall, murmuring to himself, "Why did not the woman say that three-quarters of an hour ago? I have wasted nearly an hour and gained nothing."

Scarcely had these thoughts rushed through his mind before a door was opened and a slim, rather awkward, and yet pretty girl, ran out of a room close by, and, coming up to him with her cheeks suffused with blushes, held out a piece of paper.

"I was in the inner drawing room and I heard you talking to mamma," she said. "If you are Dr. Digby, Cecilia is *very* fond of you. I know she is, for her face always looks so sweet when she speaks of you, and she was dreadfully, dreadfully angry with that horrid Mr. Phillips when he spoke as he did about you. Cecilia is at Highgate now, and this is her address written on this bit of paper. Please go to see her, for I don't think she's at all happy. Mamma isn't fond of her, but I am—I love her dearly!"

No words can pen poor Digby's astonishment as Helena poured forth her eager torrent of words.

"Go back, go back!" she said to the servant who had appeared in the hall to open the door for Digby. "I will let Dr. Digby out. No, you are not to tell mamma. I know what I am about. Good-by, Dr. Digby. I am Helena Lancaster, and I am very fond of Cecilia; this is her address. Please do go and see her!"

CHAPTER XII.

SPRING IN WINTER.

"I HAVE thought it all over," said Cecilia. "For hours in the night I have considered the subject, and I have almost quite made up my mind. Miss Timmins, do you hear me? I have almost quite made up my mind."

"Yes, my dear," said Miss Timmins, with a start. "She

was sitting by the fire in the kitchen. Her dinner, which had consisted of a poached egg on toast, was rather better and more sustaining than usual. In consequence, Miss Timmins was a little sleepy.

Cecilia had spent a week with her now, and her presence was no longer exciting. Miss Timmins was accustomed to her erratic way; to her bursts of genuine kindness; to her queer, awkward, spasmodic attempts at housekeeping; to the house cleaning which resulted in the breakage of two glasses and a breakfast cup and saucer, a soap dish and a pane of glass. Miss Timmins was accustomed, also, to Cecilia's pleasant and brilliant voice. It flowed on sometimes in a rapid torrent, sometimes with quiet depth and solemnity, sometimes with petulance, sometimes brimful of anger, sometimes again tender with the sweet, cherishing love which the young can bestow upon the old.

Miss Timmins knew Cecilia, her changing face, her changing voice, her changing way, by this time. It was very nice to have her as a companion, but nevertheless the poached egg on toast made her feel drowsy, and notwithstanding the eager, girlish tones, she was going off very comfortably into the land of dreams.

"Miss Timmins!"

"Yes, my dear, yes."

"I have made up my mind what to do. May I tell you?"

"Oh, certainly; but do you mind opening the window a little first, two or three inches? I slept rather badly last night, and the air of this room is close."

"I should think it is," said Cecilia. "There, I'll open the window from the top; that's the best way. That's what they always recommend at the hospitals. Now, may I speak to you, Miss Timmins? I have got my plan all ready, and if I don't give it utterance at once I shall dance on my head, or do something else fantastic."

"You poor girl!" said Miss Timmins, taking the young, slim fingers in her own. "What it is to be youthful! It is years and years since I was eager about anything. But I, too, remember once making a plan and being eager, and thinking nothing like it. I spoke of my plan to one who knew better, and I would not listen to the good advice, and I had my own way, and the plan turned out a failure. After that I have never been eager again—never once again have I been eager. I was nearly twenty when I made my plan.

It was beautiful, like a young tree covered all over with spring blossoms. How could I tell that every one of its blossoms held a blight at the root? I was close on twenty when I made my plan, and before long now I shall be sixty, but I have never forgotten it, nor the sort of frenzy and joy it brought with it. I can't make out why I was so taken with what was both so silly and so false, but such is youth. Now, child, I'll listen to you."

"You have made me feel sad," said Cecilia. "You must tell me about your own plan, and we will compare it with mine."

"No, child, it is buried. I would not take it out of its grave for the world. You may speak of your plan now, my dear, I am quite wide awake."

"You are a dear old thing," said Cecilia, stooping forward and kissing Miss Timmins. "Well, I shall begin straight away, for if you are not impatient to talk this thing out, I am."

"Yes, my love, tell me all that is in your heart."

"In the first place I can't stay here always."

"You cannot, my dear, for I cannot support you. Your Aunt Charlotte limited your visit to a month. She said she would pay me ten shillings a week for you, but she was distinct in her declaration that the visit and the pay were to be limited to a month. I have seven shillings a week of my own—a shilling a day. I don't pay anything for the house, which belonged to my mother, and I have exactly a shilling a day for all the other expenses. That sum would not feed two people, Cecilia Harvey, so there's no use trying to suppose that it would."

"I know," said Cecilia, "there's no manner of use. Besides, I would not be dependent on anyone for the world. I am not going back to Aunt Charlotte, for she does not wish for me, and I am not going to be a governess, because I cannot teach, and I am not going to be a nurse, because the doctors and nurses say I cannot nurse. So there is nothing for it but to do the other thing."

"What is that, my love?"

"I could be a sort of housemaid in a big house. I do love scrubbing and brushing, and I should wear gloves when I cleaned the grates, and I should tie white handkerchiefs over my head to keep the dust off when I swept the rooms. Aunt Charlotte is always saying how difficult it is to get a good housemaid. She says they are at a premium, and a good

one is simply worth any money. I thought of offering myself at a registry office. Why, what is the matter, Miss Timmins?"

Miss Timmins rose slowly from her little chair by the fire. She was a tall, slender old woman, a good deal bent from rheumatism and bad living.

Cecilia's speech had agitated her a good deal. It brought on a fit of coughing which made her quite gasp for breath. When she recovered herself she laid a bony hand on the girl's shoulder.

"I must be frank," she said. "Of all the people I have ever come across, you would make the worst and the most careless housemaid. You would break—good heavens! think of the things you have broken in this house! You would leave dust in corners, you would forget half your work. If you saw a book that pleased you, you would read it, and the beds would never get made."

"I wonder," said Cecilia sadly, "what there is that I can really do. I am not to be a teacher; I am not to be a nurse; I am not to be a domestic comfort; I am not to be an ornament to the social circle——"

"There is a ring at the door, my dear child. Will you go and answer it? I am not as tidy as I might be."

"Nor am I. I am in an awful mess; for, remember, I did poach the eggs for dinner to-day."

Nevertheless, the ring being an imperious one, Cecilia slowly went to answer it.

A couple of moments later she rushed back into the room, her cheeks in a flame, her eyes like stars.

"Miss Timmins, Miss Timmins!"

"Oh, my dear, what is it? Oh, my dear Cecilia! Pray do, Cecilia, shut the door; you have started my cough back again."

"I'm ever so sorry, but it's Dr. Digby."

"Who in the name of fortune is he?"

"The dear house physician at St. Christopher's—the best man I know. Isn't it kind of him? He has come all the way out to Highgate to see me!"

Miss Timmins stared very hard at Cecilia. All in a second she forgot her cough and her fast-coming old age and the draughts in the house.

"Where have you put the gentleman?" she asked.

"He's walking up and down the lane waiting for me."

"Waiting for you? You had better show him into the parlor. I'll come as soon as I have washed my face and hands."

"It's me he has come to see."

"Well, show him into the parlor. That sort of thing wasn't correct when I was young, but times change. Show him into the parlor. I'll be in the house, anyhow."

"The parlor is so stuffy, and he is so big. I'm going to take a walk with him. Good-by for the present."

"But, Cecilia, Cecilia!"

"Good-by, Miss Timmins; I'm going for a walk."

Eager steps flew up the ladder which led to Miss Timmins's bedroom. The poor old lady groaned as she heard cupboards being flung open and drawers slammed back into their places.

"Bless the girl!" she said to herself, "she'll bring the house down about my old ears. How excited she is, and how pleased! Bless her! it's a sweet face she has, and a sweet, high spirit. It will take a good deal to break her spirit. She is pleased to see that doctor. I wonder what sort of a person he is. I'd like to get a peep at him."

As Cecilia and Digby walked up the winding lane they little guessed that Miss Timmins's old face was pressed against the panes of her lattice window, and that her dim eyes followed them with anxious and affectionate speculations.

She nodded approvingly when she went back to her fire, and felt well inclined to resume her interrupted doze.

"The first thing I have got to tell you," said Digby, in his pleasant voice, "is that Tommy Constantine is quite well."

He turned as he spoke, and looked full at Cecilia. The brightness which suddenly spread over her face seemed to reflect sunshine. Her eyes, glad and limpid as a child's, fully returned his gaze. There was something in the unconscious sweet glance she gave him which set his heart throbbing. He forgot all that Osborne had said to him, he forgot the weary indecision of the last two days, and only knew that he was walking by the side of a girl who differed from all other girls in the fact that she interested him as he had often believed no woman could interest him again. They walked rapidly until they reached the brow of Highgate Hill. A great sweep of country lay then before them, and Cecilia stopped to utter a glad exclamation.

"How I love trees and sky and fields!" she exclaimed. "Oh,

please, let us go away from the houses! I see a green lane over there; let us get to it as quickly as possible."

"A green lane in winter," said Digby, with a smile.

"Oh, this day is not like winter—it is spring. It is an unexpected spring day," replied Cecilia. "My lane over there is very green, and we must get to it."

"But what are my patients to do?" said Digby. "This is the second afternoon I have left them. I am like a naughty boy; I have stolen out of school without leave. I must get back again before long, or I shall certainly receive the scolding I deserve."

"You won't be scolded," said Cecilia. "There will be no special cases claiming your attention. All the people you saw this morning in those long, dreary wards will get better and better as the day advances; the medicines you ordered for them will work miracles. The people in the wards—men, women, and children—will cease to cry for the doctor, for the doctor will already have made them well." Then she added, blushing vividly, "Besides, this is my day. You have given it to me by coming so unexpectedly to fill my heart with pleasure. I claim the whole of this afternoon, and we must go to the green lane and spend it there together."

"We will," said Digby. "We will forget the hospital and all the drudgery of life. Come, let us just imagine ourselves in a sort of Eden; let us see ourselves from a new point of view. I am not the doctor; I am a man, with a heart which can be made very gay and cheerful. You are a young girl, with all that radiance of youth which sometimes causes one to step into paradise before the time."

"Yes," said Cecilia again. Her "yes" was shy, but not self-conscious. Her absolute want of self-consciousness put Digby at ease. He yielded to her great charm, and they chatted and laughed like any pair of children until they reached the lane which Cecilia had so earnestly desired to walk in.

"It is lovely; it is better than I thought," she exclaimed, as they paced quickly between brown leaves and bare branches. The evening was falling in—it was already dusk, but to Cecilia the birds were singing and the sun shining.

"I never could have believed," said the doctor, "that you were such a happy woman. This new side of your character fills me with amazement."

Cecilia paused in her quick walk and looked at him earnestly.

"When something comes very, very seldom," she replied,

"we value it. I do not often get a treat, so when it comes to me I take all the good I can out of it. When I was a very little girl I was never allowed to have jam except on Sundays. People who have jam every day can scarcely believe how delicious it can taste when it is only spread on bread once a week."

"That means," said Digby, "that the pleasure in your life is small, and that a walk with me can gratify you. I am very glad to be able to give you happiness. I take an interest in you."

"Do you? I think Miss Abigail Timmins also takes an interest in me, but I do not know anyone else who does."

"Not your aunt, Mrs. Lancaster?"

"Oh, no—at least, I hope she doesn't. I hate her sort of interest."

"You have a very young cousin in that house who certainly regards you with affection. I saw her for a moment yesterday. It was she who gave me your address."

"You mean Helena. Yes, Helena is a dear child. I forgot about her; I am richer than I thought."

"I have not given you Mrs. Murray's message."

"Oh, no! what is it? I am very thankful that you did not forget to ask her what she really wanted me to do. What is the message? But first tell me if Mrs. Murray is still alive."

"No, she died two or three days ago. You need not be sorry for her; there are times when death really means gain."

"I know that," answered Cecilia heartily. "It is delightful to think that Mrs. Murray is in heaven. Her face—her weary, tired face—often flashes before me when I am awake at night. I shall see it again, but it will be changed. I am very glad. Please, what is the message?"

"The message," said Digby, "is in itself rather sad, and I don't want anything to be even tinged with mourning in this bright walk we are taking together. I have written down Mrs. Murray's words, and the exact particulars of the things she wants you to do. It is contained in this envelope. Put it into your pocket and read it after I have gone."

The daylight had almost disappeared now, but the stars were coming out, and the full moon was riding up the sky in slow majesty.

Both Cecilia and Digby forgot the lateness of the hour. She was still intensely happy in the present, and he was saying to himself:

"It is quite impossible that this girl can be a comparative stranger to me. I feel as if I had known her for years. Has my sister Winifred's spirit really entered into her? She reminds me more and more of Winnie, and yet in many things she is totally different."

Digby would scarcely acknowledge, even to himself, that the difference in Cecilia made her no whit less sweet to him. After a long pause, he said abruptly:

"I want to ask you a few questions about yourself. You are not going to be a nurse, you are not going to be a governess; you told me, when you came to see me at St. Christopher's, that you were without money. What do you mean to do in the future?"

"I don't want to think of the future now," said Cecilia, a faint petulance coming into her voice.

"But I have come here to talk about the future," said Digby gently. "It seems to me that I have got a great insight into your heart this afternoon. I do not believe you are happy. I don't believe you could be happy in such a house as Mrs. Lancaster's."

"No, and in any case she doesn't wish me to live with her."

"Does she intend you to stay in the cottage with that old lady?"

"I am not even to stay there. Miss Timmins is a dear old lady. I understand her and she understands me. You can scarcely believe how poor she is. She has only one shilling a day to spend on food and clothes and firing, but she never grumbles, and I feel I could be fairly content to live with her if she could afford to keep me, but she can't. I had a scheme in my head, and I confided it to Miss Timmins just before you came. I thought I could do that thing, for it is not really at all difficult, but——"

"Why do you stop?" said Digby. "Tell me about this scheme of yours."

"No, Miss Timmins crushed me; she said I should make the very worst—— Oh, I am not going to tell you the name of the person I meant to be, but she said I should be the very worst she had ever heard of, so that must be given up. It is very odd, but all the things I most earnestly long to do all my friends tell me I could never do. Sometimes I feel driven to desperation; not, of course, now, since you have come to see me, and since you have spoken to me so kindly, and since I can trust to you to be my friend."

"Poor child! I will undoubtedly be your friend."

"May I shake hands with you? Shall it be a bargain? You are my friend."

"And you are mine," said Digby, taking one of her hands and crushing it between his own.

He was silent for two or three minutes after this, and Cecilia walked by his side full of her own busy thoughts. It was delightful to her that a man like Digby could and would befriend her; in spite of her determination not to join his band of worshipers at St. Christopher's he had always been a sort of hero to her, and she felt an exultancy of spirit now which bore her for the time far above the commonplace ills of life.

"Why don't you speak?" she said, at last. "Do you think I shall exact too much?"

"No; wait a minute; I have something important to say."

"What is that?"

"First, we must be going home."

Cecilia gave a deep sigh.

"Oh, what a pity!" she exclaimed. "Back again to the drudgery and the small things and the vexation of spirit."

"No," replied Digby, with firmness, "when we set our faces toward home—real home—all these things vanish."

"Now you are talking enigmas," she answered; "you must know perfectly that I have no home—no home in that sense."

"Nor have I," replied Digby. "Miss Harvey," he said, suddenly, "I should like to tell you something about my past life."

"Will you, really?" said Cecilia, in a delighted voice; "that is much pleasanter than talking enigmas about impossible homes."

They had turned their steps by now, and were walking, although slowly, back toward Highgate.

"I need not say much," continued Digby. "In the past, in the long ago past when I was young, when I was a boy, I had a mother and a sister. My father was dead, but my mother filled the place of both parents to Winnie and me."

"Winnie—was that your sister? What a pretty name!"

"Yes; do you know that you are the first person to whom I have breathed that name for nearly twelve years? We were rich in those days, and I was educated at a good public school, and afterward went to Cambridge. My mother and sister came to live in Cambridge in order to be near me, and no

people were happier than we three, but——” Digby paused for nearly a minute. “My story is very commonplace,” he said then; “it was quite a commonplace tragedy that suddenly stripped all the green leaves off the tree of my youthful hopes and promises. Cambridge was not a healthy place in those days, and my mother and sister died within a week of each other. I cannot give you particulars, but the fact that I lost them both within a week will suffice to show you how sharp was the blow which was dealt to me. All of a sudden I was practically relationless, for, unlike other fellows, I had no cousins, nor uncles, nor aunts, nor near relations of any sort. After my mother’s death fortune dealt me one more blow, although that, in comparison with the tragedy I have just breathed to you, was scarcely felt by me: the money which I had always supposed I should possess vanished like smoke, and I found that I must work hard to earn a living.”

As Digby went on with his story, his voice dropped to a low tone. When he spoke of the death of his mother and sister his words came slowly, as though wrung from him by pain, but when, after a pause, he went on to tell Cecilia the reasons which induced him to take up medicine as a profession; of the wish lying deep in his heart to do something to improve the race, to do a little to mitigate the suffering and lighten the burden to which all flesh is heir, the strong hope in the man’s heart got into his voice and gave it a ringing tone, his face was animated by emotion, his eyes were full of light.

Never had anyone a more eager listener. Step by step in his briefly sketched history did Cecilia follow him. He touched the chords of suffering and tragedy; he also played on the high, sweet notes of hope in her character. Digby, drawn on by her sympathy, told her finally, something of his love for science, and of the vision which he scarcely dared to expect to realize, and yet which day and night lured him on.

“What is that?” she asked, in a trembling voice.

“I have got the germ of a discovery, which, if perfected, may be spoken of by and by as a benediction by vast numbers of suffering human beings. The first threads of a great idea are, I believe, already in my mind—but I forgot; I ought not to speak of this even to you.”

“I will never mention it again except to you when we are alone,” she said.

“When are we to be alone again?” he asked.

There was something in his voice which made the color

mount into her cheeks, but even now she failed to understand him. She was wondering dimly what was the matter, and why everything had changed within her and around her during the last couple of hours.

Digby and Cecilia reached the brow of Highgate Hill, and began to descend swiftly into the valley. Digby ceased to speak now, and they walked on side by side in silence.

Just as they got to the top of the lane where Miss Timmins lived, he stopped, and, turning round, looked full at Cecilia. The moonlight was shining on her face—it was pale; her eyes looked at him, glad, sweet, and truthful.

"Cecilia," he said softly, "will you come home with me?"

"Home?" she asked in astonishment, "with you?"

"Give me your hand."

She held it out at once—he placed it within both his own. "I am lonely," said Digby, "and so are you. Shall we make an ideal home together? May I—I mean this metaphorically—may I hold your hand always, as long as we live?"

Something in his voice made her understand at last. She sprang away, frightened and trembling.

"You have no right to speak to me like this," she said.

"Let us walk down the lane," answered Digby.

She went on a few paces in front of him. She scarcely knew whether she felt overpowered with a sense of anger or rejoicing.

"What I should like best just now," she kept saying under her breath, "would be to put my arms round Miss Timmins's neck and kiss her. I think Miss Timmins could understand a little bit of what I feel. Yes?" She stopped abruptly, for Digby was speaking again.

"I believe I could make you happy," he began. "I would promise you——"

"Don't," she interrupted passionately. "I suppose, as far as I can understand your words, that you are asking me to marry you."

"Yes, that is what I want."

"You are the best man I ever met," continued Cecilia. "You are chivalrous, you are kind, you are true. I know what I am: I am all impulse, I can do no one thing well. No one has more absolutely shown me myself than you have done; but, poor as I am in every sense of the word, I will not become the wife of a man who asks me to marry him because he is sorry for me."

"Before God you do me an injustice!" retorted Digby; "I am not generous enough for that."

"Then you——" She stopped; her face was whiter than ever.

"I will confess everything to you," said Digby; "you shall see my inmost thoughts laid bare. I will tell you the simple truth. Come, we cannot go in just yet. Walk back with me up the lane. Give me your hand, it trembles; lean on me, you don't mind, do you?"

"I won't lean on you, nor take your hand, until you have told me your story," answered Cecilia; "and you can tell it here by Miss Timmins's gate."

"Very well. This time two nights ago I had given no thought to any future wife. I remembered you, and you interested me. You had always interested me from the first time I saw you at St. Christopher's, but a wife—I did not think there was any room for a wife in my preoccupied existence.

"Two evenings ago something occurred which flashed the idea of asking you to become my wife into my brain. I won't tell you what really happened, for it does not in the least concern the issue of this conversation. I will tell you the simple, frank truth, however. The idea, presented to me abruptly, was not at first a welcome one."

"No, I quite understand," replied Cecilia, in a faint voice. "Oh, you are a good man, but I am strong enough not to wish deliberately to ruin your life. I will go in now to Miss Timmins; I have been out too late."

"You must not stir till you hear me to the end. The idea of asking you to be my wife would not leave me: it stayed with me all night, it followed me over the wards in the morning, it accompanied me as I talked to the out-patients. It became wonderfully irritating, and I found, as the day progressed, that it was overmastering every sense of work and duty, and that there was likely to be no rest for me till I came to a final decision whether to ask you this one momentous question or not. To come to this decision I felt that I must absolutely see you. I made arrangements for my afternoon duty, and went off to Harford Square with the ostensible purpose of giving you poor Mrs. Murray's dying message. I saw your aunt, who practically refused to supply me with your present address; but fortunately your cousin, who overheard our conversation, was good-natured enough to give me what I wanted. It was too

late to visit you yesterday. I came to Highgate this afternoon, and we have taken a walk together. During that walk a marvelous thing happened—something which I cannot account for, but which I know my own nature too well to doubt. I found that when I looked at you, Cecilia, and you looked back at me, my hungry heart was rested as it has never been since the day when my mother and my sister Winnie were taken from me. When you spoke your voice filled me with joy. A burden of care seemed rolled away from me. I felt young again. All talk of my marrying you out of pity can never again be spoken of between us, Cecilia; for, if I am ever lucky enough to call you my wife, it will be because I love you and cannot live without you. Is there any possibility of your caring for me? That is the question which alone has now to be considered."

Cecilia made no reply, but she leant against the little wicket gate until it creaked, and Miss Timmins, attracted by the sound, came to one of her lattice windows and peeped out.

She instantly and discreetly withdrew; not that it mattered much, for neither Digby nor Cecilia had room for her in their world at that moment.

"Is there any hope for me?" repeated Digby.

He came very close, and his hand also rested on Miss Timmins's little wicket gate.

"Think," he repeated, "of the home—quite humble and poor, but glorified by love, and made beautiful by the sympathy which two souls can each give to the other. Think——"

"Do I want to think?" answered Cecilia.

He misunderstood her words and interrupted, his voice slightly raised in excitement.

"I defy you to say to my face that you have no sympathy for me. I have seen sympathy shining out of your eyes when ever you looked at me during the last two hours."

Cecilia frantically unbuttoned her glove and pulled it off.

"Here is my hand," she said. "You can keep it; it is yours. And my life is yours, and my—my great, my deep love. O God, how gracious and beautiful you are to give me a gift like this!"

Book II.—The House of Thumbugs.

CHAPTER I.

FORTY-EIGHT HARTRICK STREET.

A YOUNG girl with bright eyes and round and pretty face was standing before her looking-glass, putting the last touches to her graceful dinner dress. The time was summer, and the year 1874. The girl's room was high up in the big house, and the rays of the western sun were streaming in through the open window on her slim young figure, as she stood arranging her soft white draperies before her glass.

The girl was Helena Lancaster. She had left her hoidenish and awkward ways behind her, and had blossomed into a bright, graceful creature in the perfection of her girlish bloom.

There came a knock at her door; she answered it somewhat impatiently.

"Yes, yes; who is there? I am not quite ready to go downstairs yet."

"May I come in?" asked Millie Lancaster's voice at the other side of the closed door. "I want to speak to you for a moment, Helena."

Helena ran across the room, drew back the bolt of her door, and opened it.

"Come in, Millie," she said. "I did not know it was you—perhaps you can help me. I am not quite satisfied with the arrangement of these flowers in my hair. Do try if you can pin them in more gracefully."

Helena's voice was sweet, high, rather quick in utterance, very happy in tone.

Millie Lancaster, also in white, came into the room and shut the door behind her. She was still a young girl, not more than three and twenty, but the faint promise of beauty that she possessed at eighteen had not increased with her years. She was short, her complexion was pale, her eyes wanted brightness.

"If only the Digbys would come," said Helena. "Cecilia is just the person I want to put these flowers right. I think Cecilia is an artist through and through. Did you ever see her arranging flowers in vases, Millie? She puts a leaf in and then a couple of flowers, and hey-presto! the little bouquet is perfect. James says that Cecilia is an artist by nature."

"Of course, what James says must be right," retorted Millie in a pettish voice. "We are all rather tired of hearing his opinions quoted each moment. You must admit, Helena, that you rather overdo that sort of thing; you ought to try and remember that we are not all engaged to your James."

"I should hope not!" replied Helena pertly. "I will try not to speak of him again, Millie, but I hope you will not prevent my speaking to him, as he is dining here to-night."

Millie looked cross and turned away.

At this moment the sound of wheels was heard, and a cab drew up at the front door. Helena rushed to her window and peeped out.

"Oh," she said, "here they are at last! Now, if I could smuggle Cecilia up here for a moment."

"How can you be so unreasonable, Helena. It is almost the dinner hour now. You know how vexed mamma is when we are not waiting in the drawing room to receive our guests. Several of them have already arrived—we ought both to have been in the drawing room ten minutes ago. Come, you silly creature! You look pretty enough even to please your precious James. Come, come, let us go downstairs."

"I wonder," said Helena, as the two sisters ran down the broad stairs side by side, "if Cecilia felt as I do now when she was first engaged to Laurence Digby?"

"Scarcely likely," answered Millie with some scorn; "Cecilia was going to marry a man without money and without position, whereas you—well, Helena, we all know what the world thinks of, and, better still, what the world is going to think of, Dr. Phillips. He is both clever and rich."

"I know that," answered Helena. "People always talk to me about his cleverness and about his riches. They seem to think I am going to marry him because of these two things. No one, no one gives me credit——" she stopped, and added wistfully, speaking more to herself than to her sister:

"If I were quite sure of being as happy as Cecilia is I should be more than thankful."

"You are a very, very silly girl," replied Millie, giving her

sister a half contemptuous glance. "If only your chances were mine," she murmured under her breath.

When Millie and Helena entered the drawing room several of the guests had already arrived. Mrs. Lancaster was standing near the door receiving them as they came in. George was also present, but Chatty's face was missing. More than two years ago Chatty had married, and had gone away from the home circle.

Millie went up at once to her mother's side and began to perform her part in receiving and talking to the different visitors, but Helena made her way swiftly across the inner drawing room to where a girlish figure, in a very simple dress, was standing.

"Here I am, Cecilia," she exclaimed.

Cecilia bent her head, she was a little taller than her cousin, and kissed her gravely.

"Where is Dr. Digby?" whispered Helena.

"Here, just behind the curtain, talking to Mr. Dickson. Laurence, come and speak to Helena, she wants you to wish her joy."

Digby came forward at once.

"I wish you the best happiness," he said. He took Helena's hand and shook it heartily. "I hope you will be very happy, as happy——"

"As we are," interrupted Cecilia. "Helena," she continued, putting her hand on her young cousin's shoulder, and speaking with her old impulse, "I want you with all my heart to be happy, but I do not believe it is possible that you can have quite such a beautiful life as Laurence and I have."

Helena's eyes looked gravely back at Cecilia. A wistful expression crept into them; she was about to reply when Digby addressed her.

"I have not seen Phillips since I heard of your engagement, Helena. Is he coming here to-night?"

"Yes, of course; I think he has just arrived. See, he is coming into the room now."

The door of the drawing room was thrown open, and Phillips, tall, erect, and strikingly handsome entered.

He always made an effect when he came into a room. He was accustomed to the little hush that followed the announcement of his name. The battery of eyes which assailed him gave him satisfaction, for he read, or thought he read, admiration in each glance.

Phillips was in every sense a man of the world. Already he was a popular doctor, and bade fair to have a large practice in a few years' time. He and Digby met each other cordially. If any feud still existed between the two men it had long ago been buried out of sight. Digby was a marked contrast to Phillips; he looked more rugged than he had done three years ago, but his eyes still gleamed out of his face with their old kindly spirit, his smile was more frequent and, if possible, sweeter than in the bygone days, but in the matter of dress he was as careless and as unobservant as ever.

After speaking to Helena and Cecilia, Phillips came up and joined Digby. They talked in low voices together, and a moment afterward dinner was announced, and the many visitors, for the party was a large one, strolled down in pairs to the dining room.

Cecilia found herself sitting near her cousin George. Years had improved George Lancaster. He was now a good looking, gentlemanly man. He was doing well in his city life, was an excellent son and brother, and still kept a warm corner in his heart for his pretty cousin Cecilia.

Whatever doubts there had been in the past with regard to the beauty of Dr. Digby's young wife they had resolved themselves long since into certainties. Cecilia had that rare type of beauty which arrests attention more than any other. She possessed one of those queer, bewitching, expressive faces, that change with each passing emotion and are the most tantalizing and the most attractive in the world.

Cecilia's dress was nearly as plain as it was on that celebrated day when she had come down to dinner in her dark blue serge and pearl ornaments, but it was now perfect in taste and of a delicate shade of color which set off her fair complexion and bright hair to the best advantage.

When a face is all shining and beaming with happiness, even if the features are plain, people, unless they happen to be very bad, like to look at it. In Cecilia's case the features were the reverse of plain, and the happiness was so marked round the sweet mouth and shone so radiantly out of the expressive eyes that more than one person remarked it.

"It is a pleasure to even watch Mrs. Digby," one of the ladies present said to her neighbor. "What has the world done to her that she should seem so full of sunshine?"

George spoke in low tones to his cousin.

"Are you glad about Helena?" he asked.

"Yes, I think I am glad."

"The mater is in ecstasies."

"Oh, that is a matter of course."

Cecilia glanced down the long table at her aunt, and then turned to her cousin with a smile.

"Phillips is very rich," pursued George, "so of course the mater has been wanting the match for some time. Doubtless it is a very fine thing for little Helena, but I hope Phillips will make her happy."

"Laurence says that Mr. Phillips has greatly improved," remarked Cecilia in a grave voice.

"Between ourselves he needed improvement, Cecilia. What a cad he made of himself the day you snubbed him at our dinner party. Ha, ha! I like to recall his face when you stood up before everyone and told him he was not speaking the truth."

Cecilia laughed, and then she added earnestly:

"You must forget that day now, George. We must think everything that is good of Mr. Phillips for little Helena's sake."

"They talk of him in the profession as clever," pursued George. "I heard him spoken of in tones of the highest praise the other day. You know, of course, that he was called in to see Sir Aubin Worth; he is sure to make a great handle of that. Oh, there is little doubt that he is likely to rise to a high place in the medical world."

Cecilia Digby gave the faintest little possible ghost of a sigh. No one who did not care for her as much as George did would have noticed it, but he glanced up from his plate and gave her a quick look.

"I know what you are thinking about," he said.

"What?" she asked in some alarm.

"You are wishing, I know you are wishing, that your Laurence had the same chances that Helena's James has. Cecilia, I will whisper something to you. Digby is worth a thousand of Phillips—he is worth ten thousand of him. Digby is Phillips's superior in character, in mind, in everything."

"Thank you, George," said Cecilia. [The ready tears dimmed her bright eyes for a minute. "Let us change the subject," she said. "You have never asked me about Babs."

"As if I could forget her, the monkey! Has she been behaving herself as atrociously as usual?"

"Yes—even more so. She took her mug of milk this morning and threw it across the nursery, then she laughed and called herself 'dood Babs.'"

"Ah! I said I had accepted an enormous responsibility when I consented to be that child's godfather. Cecilia, do you know that Phillips has taken a house in Hartrick Street?"

"Has he?" responded Cecilia in a listless voice.

"Yes; it is to be splendidly furnished. He is in great luck to secure one of those houses; there is no better position for a rising doctor than Hartrick Street. He has taken No. 47, and I was told to-day that No. 48 was going a bargain."

"Ah!" exclaimed Cecilia. The quick color flashed into her face.

"I wish Digby would take No. 48," pursued George.

"How could he, George? We are very poor, you know."

"It is a queer coincidence," said George; "but ever since you married Digby, Cecil, I am always running up against your husband's profession in one form or another. A day or two ago I met a very nice man at my club, called Everard. He happened to know your husband—was with him at St. Christopher's some years ago; he began groaning and lamenting over the way in which Digby throws himself away. He said that Digby never could do anything until he took a good house in a good position; then he quoted a man to me who is now making an enormous income, and yet when he married he had scarcely enough money to meet the yearly rent of his house. The man in question took a house in this very Hartrick Street. He was clever, and was at once thrown into a fashionable circle, who always recognize real merit. Had he kept in the slums, as Digby has done, do you think he would be a rich man now?"

"George," said Cecilia, her eyes flashing, "you are a tempter. You find out my weak spot; you assail me just where I have no courage to resist. Isn't it wicked of you to take the form of the tempter and enter our little Eden?"

"Forgive me," said George.

"Could there be a happier home than the little house you speak of as in the slums?" pursued Cecilia.

"No, no; I grant it. But I think you and Digby would have a happy home anywhere, be it slum or palace. Your happiness lies quite apart from your house."

"Yes, I know it, and yet you tempt me frightfully. I hate to see Laurence overlooked. Not that he cares. Watch him now; who looks the most contented—my own Laurence or Mr. Phillips?"

"Oh, don't compare them," said George. "There is nothing on earth I wouldn't do for your husband, Cecil; whereas Phillips!—To tell you the truth, I have never ceased regretting that dear, good natured little Helena is to be thrown away on him."

Cecilia's face became anxious. She looked from her husband to Phillips, then at Helena, then her eyes wandered back to Digby again. He intercepted her glance, and gave her a quick nod and smile. She flushed, and resumed her conversation with her cousin. It drifted into the channel where Cecilia's happiest thoughts now dwelt. There was an earnest talk between the cousins about a certain young person who had not yet attained the dignity of two years. Her ways, her doings, her most remarkable sayings, were all recorded by the young mother for the benefit of the very enthusiastic and most kind hearted godfather, who, in a spirit of mischief, promised rewards for bad behavior and punishment for good.

"I know you will bring up that infant all wrong," said George. "I must make it my duty to come over and see her every Sunday. I will not allow her to be perverted into the narrow channels where the good little girls always walk. Babs shall not be a good little girl. What do you think of this rhyme, which I have specially adapted for her benefit?"

*"Don't come when you're called
Don't do what you're bid.
Slam the door after you,
Bad little kid."*

Cecilia pretended to be shocked, but once more her merry laughter attracted the attention and the envy of graver people.

In the course of the evening Helena came over and sat by Cecilia's side.

"You have heard about the house that James has taken?" she asked.

"Yes, Helena."

"He is very much pleased about it," continued Helena, with a soft little half sorrowful sigh.

Cecilia slipped her arm round her cousin's waist.

"Aren't you glad yourself, Helena?" she whispered.

"I don't know. All this success and prosperity frighten me. Mamma is so pleased, and all the people who see me say that I am a lucky girl. They think of the wealth, all of them, and of the good place Dr. Phillips's wife can take in society; and it is impossible for anyone to guess that I am not marrying James for any of these things."

"Well, Helena, I understand," said Cecilia. "Your heart is full of love, just as mine was when I was engaged, just as mine has kept ever since. You have no room in your heart for the worldly, ambitious aspect of the question. But it is nice, little Helena, to have got the two—the love *and* the fame. It is very nice, is it not?"

"I suppose it is," replied Helena; "but if I might just consult my own tastes, I would much rather go to live at 27 Coxmoor Street—the house next to yours."

"My dear Helena, that tumble-down, dirty, dowdy place!"

"It would suit me better than Hartrick Street. I have lived in a big house all my life, and I hate big houses. I want small, cozy rooms like yours, and low stairs, and not many of them."

While her cousin was speaking, Cecilia raised her eyes and noticed that Phillips and two or three other men had entered the drawing room. His eyes searched for Helena at once, and seeing with whom she was speaking, a queer expression—half of malice, half of triumph—flashed over his face. He strode across the room, and came up to the corner where Cecilia and Helena were talking.

"May I join the group?" he asked. "Is there room for me on the sofa?"

Helena moved a little closer to Cecilia, and Phillips, seating himself, immediately took the management of the conversation. He told Cecilia of his good fortune in having secured No. 47 Hartrick Street.

"I have been talking the matter over with your husband," he said, addressing Mrs. Digby, "and urging him most strongly to secure No. 48, which happens to be vacant, and will be sold or let at a slightly reduced rent in consequence of poor Eden Browne having died there. You knew Eden Browne, of course, at least by name, Mrs. Digby? He went mad over some germ theory which never came to anything."

"My husband says——" began Cecilia.

Phillips interrupted her with a laugh.

"Forgive me," he said, "there are some men in the profes-

sion who are well aware of the fact that Digby is tarred with the same brush as poor Eden Browne. What so appropriate, then, as your both coming to live in his house?"

"You have really spoken to Laurence of this?" asked Cecilia.

"Yes, but bless the man, he's as quixotic and unworldly as ever. He hinted broadly to my face that a contented mind was a continual feast, and darkly alluded to riches and misery, to ambition and a fall. You must rouse him, Mrs. Digby—it's your duty; there isn't a cleverer man in the profession."

"You admit that now?" said Cecilia. Her eyes flashed with the angry light which had filled them three and a half years ago, when Phillips had mentioned Digby's name for the purpose of slighting it. The fire in her eyes was now met by defiance in his, but his answer was sweet and rather languid in tone.

"I think what I always thought," he said. "Come, Helena, the piano is vacant; you must sing my favorite song:

'My heart is like a singing bird.'

The words have been echoing in my head all day."

Helena Lancaster rose at once and went to the piano. Her voice was very full and beautiful. It was her great gift. When she used it she rose above the commonplace. She ran her slim fingers over the keys of the piano, and her words, with a queer undertone of pathos running through all their gladness, filled the room.

"My heart is like a singing bird
Whose nest is in a watered shoot;
My heart is like an apple tree
Whose boughs are bent with thick-set fruit;
My heart is like a rainbow shell
That paddles in a halcyon sea;
My heart is gladder than all these,
Because my love is come to me.

"Raise me a dais of silk and down,
Hang it with vair and purple dyes;
Carve it with doves and pomegranates,
And peacocks with a hundred eyes;
Work it in gold and silver grapes,
In leaves and silver fleur-de-lys:
Because the birthday of my life
Is come, my love is come to me."

The babel of talk ceased. Many people turned to watch

the beautiful singer. When Helena left the piano, Phillips gave her an earnest look, which thrilled through her heart, and Digby came up and took her hand.

"Thank you," he said. "Yours is the kind of voice to banish headache and heartache. I congratulate you, Phillips, on having won such a treasure. You will find it of use many a day."

"But the singer looks tired," said Cecilia, who had also joined the group. "Perhaps she has a headache herself."

"No," replied Helen, "I have no headache, but perhaps my face expresses some of the anxiety I feel. I do dreadfully want to ask Dr. Digby something."

"What is that, my dear?" he inquired, in his kindest way.

"It is this: as I cannot come to live near Cecilia in Coxmoor Street, I want her to come to 48 Hartrick Street."

Helena blushed, and raised pleading eyes to Digby's face as she spoke.

He laughed.

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed. "What next? You rich folk seem to be in a conspiracy to tempt a humble-minded man to his destruction. Lancaster, come here. Lancaster, have the goodness to listen to what these good people say. First of all Phillips and now Helena want me to plunge into debt, and take a house six times too large for me and twenty times too expensive. I should treat it as a joke, but that they both manage to look grave when they make the proposition. Cecilia, will you give them a piece of your mind? You know better how to crush this sort of serpent in the grass than I do. Now then, good folks, listen to my wife."

Digby stretched out his hand and drew Cecilia forward as he spoke. The light fell full on her soft, silvery gray dress, on her shining golden head, and her beautiful, pale, expressive face.

"Stop a minute," said Lancaster; "before you listen to Cecilia, hear me. I believe—on my honor, I emphatically believe—that you could not do a wiser thing, Digby, than to see the agent who has the letting of 48 Hartrick Street early to-morrow morning and close with him before the day is out. No fear of your clashing with Phillips, for you are in different lines. My advice is, don't lose the chance, Digby, for I am convinced that you can rise to anything if only you have fair play."

Lancaster turned on his heel as he said the last words. His

mother was calling him to attend to a neglected guest, but Phillips still stood near Helena, and Cecilia, with the light shining full on her, was facing her husband.

"Now, Cecilia, crush the whole thing," he said, giving her one of his sweet yet strong glances.

But Cecilia was not looking at her husband. She had caught a fresh gleam of the ill concealed triumph on Phillips's face. Her answer, when it came at last, was in reply to that.

"I agree with my cousin George," she said. "I should like of all things to go and live in Hartrick Street."

CHAPTER II.

HEREDITY.

DIGBY and his wife drove home together in silence. This was not their usual custom. When Cecilia was alone with her husband she generally had much to say, she was wont to pour into his ears the glad happy nothings which came to her lips, to express each thought as it bubbled up from her heart, to tell him all that Babs had said, all the miraculous performances that Babs had made, and often to stop her eager speech and put her arms round his neck, and lay her head on his shoulder, or kiss his brow, more wrinkled now than of old.

But to-night Cecilia was silent—she sat in her own corner of the cab, her white shawl wrapped tightly round her, her face in shadow. Digby did not ask her what her thoughts were. With his natural energy there was also a great power of waiting about him, and he felt assured that when Cecilia was ready to explain the very startling admission she had made at the Lancasters' would be the best and only time to listen to her.

The Digbys' house was far away from any fashionable quarter—they drove past Bloomsbury into those dreary regions which surround Gray's Inn Fields; they entered a narrow and dull street in this quarter. The cab stopped at last before a small house in front of which hung the red lamp which generally characterizes a doctor's residence.

The rays from the lamp shed some bars of color on the pavement—rain was falling from the summer sky. It was a dark night, neither moon nor stars visible.

Digby got out first and paid the cabman his fare, then he held out his hand to help his wife to alight. She raised her

eyes as she did so to a certain window. There should be a dim light in this window, the softened and pleasant light which speaks to a mother of a sheltered and safe nursery where little lives are folded away like flowers in peaceful sleep.

The moment she looked up now she uttered a cry.

"Laurence," she said, "they have turned the gas full on in baby's nursery; she must be awake—I do hope she is not ill!"

Digby smiled.

"You are overanxious, my dear," he said; "we are at home now, we can soon ascertain if anything is wrong."

Digby opened the hall door with his latchkey, and the two went into the narrow passage.

Their one general servant had gone to bed, but the nurse, a young woman of twenty, hearing sounds in the hall, came quickly downstairs, and began to speak in a hurried and agitated voice.

"I am so glad you have come back!" she said, addressing Digby; "I don't like the way baby is going on a bit."

"There now, I knew the child was ill!" said Cecilia. She flung her shawl off, threw it on the hall table, and rushed upstairs, her footsteps light and fleet, her face blanched, her heart beating with fast and terrified fear.

The glare from the gas made the nursery feel hot and stifling—its full power lay across the bed where the baby of eighteen months lay slumbering.

Cecilia walked straight across the room, lowered the gas, then going up to the bed bent over it. The baby's breathing was rapid, she tossed her arms in her sleep, and heavy moans came from her parted lips.

Cecilia laid her hand on the little forehead, it was hot and dry. She went back again to the head of the stairs.

"Laurence," she said, in a breathless way, "come up to baby at once."

"I am coming," he replied. He entered the nursery the next moment, followed by the nurse.

"What did you notice wrong, Nurse?" he asked, as he bent over the child. "Cecilia, dear, I must have a lighted candle, please. No, the light won't hurt baby, don't be frightened. What have you noticed wrong with the child, Nurse?"

"She has been very hot and restless, sir, waking up several times with piercing shrieks and putting her hand constantly to her head. I thought her very fretful all day, and her eyes—

they looked queer; it seemed to me as if she squinted. It took me all of a heap when I saw that, for it was the way mother's little Mary Jane was took."

"Why did you not tell us this before we went out?" asked Digby sternly.

"It was not until she was took so bad in her sleep that it came to my mind, sir; then I remembered it and wondered if her eyes was going to change. They do sometimes when the wind alters, I am told. Well, I'm glad you are home, ma'am, and you, sir, for if the blessed child has got something——"

"Hush," said Digby, "you need not say any more. Now, stand aside, please."

The girl, subdued by the doctor's firm tone, stepped into the shadow, and the father and mother bent over the little bed.

The baby was a beautiful child, firm of limbs and round of face. Heavy lashes shaded her eyes, and her golden brown hair lay in lovely tendrils on her little forehead. Now, crimson spots burned on her cheeks and the expression of the small face was full of suffering.

After feeling the child's brow and wrist, Digby bent forward and, lifting the heavy eyelids, looked at the eyes.

"You will wake her!" said Cecilia in a stifled tone of agony. "Why do you disturb her? It must be good for her to sleep."

"I won't hurt her, dear," he replied tenderly. "Is it likely that I should injure her? I must ascertain the exact state of the case." He put his finger into the baby's mouth as he spoke and felt the ridges of her swollen gums.

"The present condition of the child may be due to her teeth," he said. "If so, I can relieve it, but I don't quite like the look of her eyes. I want to say a word to you, Cecilia; will you come into the other room with me for a moment?"

"Oh, don't mind talking to me now!" she exclaimed irritably: "relieve baby, save baby! What can you have to say to me just now?"

"It is necessary for me to ask you a question. Come, I won't keep you from baby more than a minute or two."

Digby led his wife on to the landing; the door of their own bedroom stood open; he drew her inside, and, putting his hand on her shoulder, looked into her face.

"Cecilia," he said, "our child is very ill, but I have every hope, every confidence, that I may save her life. In cases of this kind, however, a doctor ought to be armed with all pos-

sible knowledge. I want to ask you a question. You may think it a strange one, but it is necessary that I should know the truth."

"Ask me anything you like," replied Cecilia, wringing her hands in misery, "only let me go back quickly to baby."

"You shall go back as soon as you have changed your dress, rested your mind a little, and answered my question."

"Oh, yes, yes! Ask your question, Laurence. Why do you torture me with this delay? How can you speak of my resting my mind when baby is so ill?"

"My dear," said Digby in his tenderest tone, "do you suppose that I do not feel for you? I suffer with you, my love. But now for my question. The state of baby's eyes indicates certain symptoms. Cecilia, forgive me for an abrupt remark. Both your parents died young—of what did they die?"

Cecilia looked at her husband in amazement.

"Answer me," he said, almost impatiently. "Of what did your parents die?"

"My father was killed by a fall while in India."

"Ah!" The doctor's brow cleared. "And your mother?" he added more anxiously.

"My mother was ill for a long time—a year or so. I think she must have had consumption, for she coughed a good deal."

"Yes, yes. Just so. That is what I feared."

"O Laurence, what do you fear?" Cecilia sprang to his side and caught his arm with her two hands. "What do you fear?" she repeated. "Is our baby going to die?"

"I trust not, but baby is very ill. I will conceal nothing from you, Cecilia. Baby may be now suffering from a form of brain disease for which there is no cure; or again, the whole attack may be due to teething. If the latter, she will live. If the former——"

"Don't," said Cecilia. "Don't say the words; I won't listen."

"My love, this is my trouble as well as yours. God may be merciful. Try and get a little calm. If the baby's brain is affected, nothing I can do will alter the course of that disease, which must end in death; but if, on the other hand, the present derangement of her system is due to teeth, I may, and probably shall, be able to save her life. In the latter case a great deal depends on you. You must be very quiet, and

very collected, and have all your wits about you, if you wish to save baby's life. Now I am going back to her. Follow me when you feel able to forget yourself."

"Oh, you have good cause not to trust me!" said Cecilia. The doctor left the room, and the unhappy young wife flung herself on her knees by the side of the bed.

It is one thing to fling yourself by your bedside and try to calm an anguished and torn heart by words of prayer. It is another thing for the prayer to rise to Heaven and the answer to come down. There are souls filled with such strong faith that such results may be achieved, but Cecilia's was not one of these.

She soon sprang to her feet, and began frantically to unfasten her pretty dinner dress. Her fingers trembled with the speed she used. Her hot haste made her awkward. Buttons would twist themselves in the buttonholes instead of getting free; hooks would keep in their eyelet holes with a pertinacity which defied all efforts to release them. Cecilia had at last to use grim force. She was free of the body of her dress, of her skirt. She ran to her wardrobe to take down a long, white dressing-gown. It was hung at the back of the deep recess; other garments covered it on the same hook. She wrestled fiercely, and made dire havoc in the wardrobe, but at last she was successful. She was ready now to go into the nursery and take charge of her baby.

She walked to the door, and tried to open it.

It was just then that a queer thing happened. Cecilia became possessed of a terrible nervous tremor. She was absolutely certain that if she went into the nursery, and saw despair written on her husband's face, she should faint. She was as sure of this as, three years and a half ago, she had been certain of becoming unconscious, helpless, worthless, by Tommy Constantine's bedside.

"I cannot control myself," she said aloud. "Good God! what kind of creature has Laurence married! My little child's life hangs in the balance, and I cannot see her—I cannot be with her because I am destitute of self control. Oh, I thought I had overcome this feeling forever! Did I not vow that I would never give way again after Tommy so nearly died? Am I to think nothing of the training I have had for the last three years and a half—the daily influence of a man like my husband? Am I to think nothing of the strength that must have come to me through watching his life, through sharing

his sentiments, through learning to see the great, suffering world through his eyes?

"There, there! I'll just walk up to the wardrobe and back again. I'll banish the feeling which tells me I shall faint, which whispers to me that I shall fail. I hear Laurence's step in the nursery. He is doing something for baby—little Babs—my darling, my beauty, my sweetheart! Perhaps she is awake now, and looking round for her mother. How queer it was of Laurence to pull her eyes open, and then to ask me that question about my parents. Does he blame me because baby is ill? Ought I never to have married? Oh! this new doctrine of heredity is enough to drive any woman mad!

"How often have I walked to the wardrobe and back? A dozen times, I think. Well, I'm calm enough now. I'll feel my own hand. It's quite cold; that's right. I'm not a bit feverish: I'm sure I was feverish the night Tommy Constantine was so ill. My heart does thump, of course; but that's only natural. A mother's first child—dying at such short notice—quite well when we went out to dinner—now dying! Such a sweet child, too; even strangers said that. Such eyes and such dear little ways, so saucy, such a daring little monkey—no, no; not a monkey—a little lovely spirit soul! I see her when she looks up, when she smiles. There is God in her face. They say babies are very near God, very close to heaven. Poor George Lancaster! he will be sorry when he hears.

"Now I'm all right—I never felt calmer in my life; it's wonderful, but I really don't feel it. Let me say it over to myself not to be taken by surprise. Baby has something wrong with her brain and she can't recover, and it is because my mother died of consumption. No, no, I am sure Laurence said something else, but I can't recall the words. It's most queer of me. Well, at any rate, I'm all right now, and I'm going into the room. He said that I must be very calm and quiet, he'll see that I am. I know exactly what I'll do. I'll sit in the rocking-chair and I'll ask him to put baby into my arms; she always did love to cuddle up close to me! Oh, my little sweet, you shall get close to my heart again—close, very close!

"What is that? What is that noise? Somebody walking fast; it's Laurence; he's wondering that I'm not coming. Unnatural mother, cold-hearted wife! There, I'll call to him.

Coming, Laurence! Coming! My voice won't sound—it won't get beyond my lips. Well, I'll turn the handle of the door—it won't move, my hands feel dead. What is the matter with me? I *will* break this spell; it must have been hours since Laurence went away. Perhaps baby is dead! After all, I don't hear a sound in the room, it's as still as a—as a *grave*. I'm going in at last, however. Whatever has happened, I am prepared now. O Laurence! O Laurence, Laurence!"

"My darling! What is it? Cecilia, how strange you look."

Digby had opened the bedroom door suddenly. He put his arms around his wife and drew her to his side.

"You can help us now nicely," he said in his calm reassuring voice.

"Is baby dead, Laurence?"

"No, no; far from dead. I have lanced her gums and she is much better."

"Then it was not her brain? It was not my mother's fault?"

"No, thank God," said Digby. "What I dreaded half an hour ago was not the case, it was but a teething trouble. Baby will live. Come and sit by her now. She is in a natural sleep."

"And I did not faint," said Cecilia to herself, as she followed her husband into the nursery. "Laurence's influence has done something for me. I did not faint, but I felt very queer."

CHAPTER III.

BRAINS OR MONEY.

"I do not think," said Mrs. Lancaster, "that anything has given me more satisfaction than this engagement of Helena's. It is the last thing I should have expected from her. You, Millie, have been from your birth a really good girl—you have always walked in the ways you ought to walk in—your ideas are what they should be, your religious convictions are correct, you are evangelical in the tone of your mind, you are not extravagant, you are not thoughtless, you have always been a comfort to me."

Mrs. Lancaster paused here.

"Yes, mamma," responded Millie.

She was standing by her parent in one of the bay windows of the drawing room. She did not look well, and the expression of her face was scarcely contented. Mrs. Lancaster surveyed her eldest daughter from top to toe.

"Millie," she said, "I am disappointed in you. Notwithstanding all your excellences you have turned out mediocre. You are twenty-three and you have not yet had a proposal. Chatty was married before she was twenty. Chatty was also a good girl, but not such a comfort to me as you have been. She, however, has gained a husband, she is established in a comfortable house in the country, and I feel that in every sense of the word I have done my duty by her."

"About Helena, mamma," said Millie. "It was Helena you were talking of."

"Yes," resumed Mrs. Lancaster, waving her hand in a slightly imperative manner, "I am coming back to the subject of Helena. As a child, Helena displeased me far more than either you or Chatty. She would not walk in the ways indicated to her by her mother. She was always troublesome at lessons; she was always untidy, awkward, and *gauche* in appearance. When she was between fifteen and sixteen I felt absolutely in despair about her. It was at that time, you may remember, Millie, that she took such a violent friendship for her cousin Cecilia. I was terrified; I felt certain that she would become infected by Cecilia's flighty ways."

"Well, mamma," responded Millie, "the flighty ones, as you call them, seem to have the best of it. Cecilia is married to a very nice man; I am sure everyone likes Dr. Digby—and Helena——"

"Yes, yes, my dear. I am delighted with Helena. She has just done what I did not expect her to do—she has grown up a beauty, and she has become engaged to a wealthy and well connected man. There is no person of my acquaintance to whom I would so gladly give my child as to James Phillips. He has everything to recommend him—money, position, talent, personal appearance."

"Oh, yes; mamma, yes. All the same I do not care for him; I would much rather have Cecilia's husband, Dr. Digby."

Mrs. Lancaster threw up her hands. "Millie," she said, "you are incorrigible; you were all that was good and pleasant in your youth, but I perceive that, now you are really grown up, and indeed, my dear, past your very early youth, you are becoming eccentric. When once a woman becomes

eccentric she is done for. Millie, I see that you intend to be the old maid of the family."

"Very well, mamma. There is generally an old maid in most households. I must, however, stick to my opinion that I prefer Cecilia's husband to Helena's betrothed."

"I grant that there is something lovable about Dr. Digby, said Mrs. Lancaster, "but he is poor, and he won't do anything to advance himself. Now, dear James Phillips!—Oh, he is all that is delightful. He has just taken the house he ought to take in Hartrick Street, and he is certain to get a first-class practise before long. Of course a man with large private means can afford to wait for the best sort of patients. I should not wonder if he started as a specialist in some line; perhaps the eye. I think I shall suggest the eye to him. Oculists make enormous fortunes."

"I expect Dr. Phillips will make his choice independently of you, mamma," said Millie Lancaster; then she added, leaning up against the window and looking out, "there was a time when Helena could not bear him. You remember how spiteful he was about Dr. Digby some years ago, and how rude to Cecilia."

"How rude Cecilia was to him, you mean, Millie."

"No, I don't. I mean exactly what I said. Helena took Cecilia's part then, and was never tired of abusing her beloved James; now she is in love with the same man and going to marry him. Cecilia, too, seems quite friendly with him. Well, I call the world a strange and fickle place."

"I, on the contrary, call the world a sensible place, my dear Millie. To those who use it aright it brings wisdom with years. Cecilia has lost some of her erratic ways since her marriage, and Helena also has gained knowledge and is wise enough not to throw away her advantages. What a pretty creature she is now—any mother might be proud of her. Oh, and here she is—talk of an angel. Well, my darling, and what is the matter now? How excited you look!"

Helena rushed into the room with the impetuosity of a sudden and a vigorous spring breeze. She was in the daintiest of white muslin costumes. Her bonny nut-brown hair was tied back with blue ribbons, her cheeks had wild roses in them, and her big hazel eyes were wonderfully bright. Mrs. Lancaster went up to her young daughter, put her arms round her neck and kissed her.

"Your dress is wonderfully becoming, Helena," she said.

"Oh, yes, mamma, yes; but it doesn't matter about my dress. Have you heard of poor dear Cecil?"

"Nothing fresh, my dear. Poor dear Cecil seemed in perfect health and spirits last night. Has anything happened to her since?"

"Oh, haven't you heard? James has just come, and he has told me—it is baby, dear little Nance. She was very ill last night and not expected to recover. I am going over to Cecil at once."

Mrs. Lancaster pushed back a few stray locks of Helena's wavy hair.

"My dear child," she said, "of course I'm very sorry for Cecilia, but need you go yourself to inquire for baby? You know you are due at the Cravens's afternoon party."

"You can give my excuses to them, mamma. You and Millie are going."

"And so is Dr. Phillips."

"Well, he is downstairs, he is waiting to accompany you; I am going to Cecilia. Do you think she can be in trouble like this, and I away from her? She is my dear friend, my very dearest friend."

"Helena darling, you will wear yourself out with this impetuosity."

"I cannot help that, mamma; good-by; I just thought I'd tell you about the baby." Helena prepared to rush out of the room.

"Does James know you are not going with us, Helena?"

"I shall tell him as I run downstairs. Good-by, mamma; if you have no message for Cecilia I shall be off at once."

"Well, Helena, if you must go—I do not think it is prudent; the child may have something infectious. The Digbys live in such a horrid part of town. Oh, I declare she's gone! What a comfort that Dr. Phillips will soon have the management of her; she is too erratic—Helena [following her daughter to the top of the stairs], if you must go to Cecilia, give her our affectionate love; say all that's proper. I'd come and see dear baby myself, but I haven't a moment; every second of my time is occupied with your trousseau, and the proper furnishing of your house just at present. Oh, I believe the child has gone! I wonder if James Phillips has taken her. I do hate to see girls as pretty as Helena driving about in hansoms by themselves."

Mrs. Lancaster came back to her drawing room to inveigh

against the world in general, and against Cecilia Digby in particular for having a baby so troublesome as to be taken ill just when Helena was most wanted at home.

Phillips, who went to the drawing room a moment or two after, did certainly nothing to appease her wrath.

"You must give my excuses to the Cravens," he said. "I am not going there."

"O James," said Mrs. Lancaster, looking with eyes full of admiration at her future son-in-law, "how trying all this must be for you! How can I apologize for Helen?"

"Apologize?" replied the young man. "There is nothing to apologize about. I should think very little of Helena if she did not go to see her friend when she is in trouble. Good-by, Mrs. Lancaster. I shall look in as usual this evening."

He left the room, looking handsome and dignified, and Mrs. Lancaster tried to smooth her ruffled brows and to wonder what strange, new turn the world was taking in general.

Meanwhile Helena's hansom bowled swiftly away in the direction of Coxmoor Street. It arrived there in a little less than a quarter of an hour. Helena sprang lightly out, rang the bell at the Digbys' hall door, and in another moment was standing by her friend's side.

"Hush!" said Cecilia, coming up to her cousin. "Don't speak too loud; baby is asleep in the next room. She is much better; Laurence says she will live now."

"Dear Cecil!" exclaimed Helena. She put her arms round her friend's neck and kissed her two or three times. "How dreadful you look," she said; "how white, how worn! To think that I should have been sleeping happily, and you in this agony. Cecil, you look ten years older than you did this time yesterday."

"Hush!" said Cecilia again, speaking still in that strained sort of subdued voice. "I am all right now, but since I saw you—since I saw you, Helena, I think I must have descended into hell. For a time I was there in the fire. It is all over now, for baby will live, but I am numbed to-day, in every sense of the word."

There was no doubt that Helena understood her cousin Cecilia. She did not worry her with any more questions.

"You want a rest," she said. "Sit in this easy-chair and talk to me. But, first, may I get you a cup of coffee? You know I can make it splendidly."

"If you like, darling." Cecilia sat back in the armchair in which Helena had placed her, and closed her eyes wearily.

"I will be back in ten minutes," said the youngest Miss Lancaster. With a bright little nod she ran out of the room and went down to Cecilia's kitchen. It was by no means her first visit to this apartment, and the overworked general servant received her with good humor. Helena made her coffee in her way, and also toasted some bread, and brought the coffee and the toast, daintily served, to her friend. They had a cup of coffee each, and Cecilia ate some of the crisp toast. Then Helena began to talk about her own prospects.

"I know baby is doing well," she said.

"Yes, she'll be much as usual by to-morrow."

"Well, we must talk of somebody else. Please try and remember that I am the important person now. It is very nice to be a bride-elect, and to be fussed over, and to have everything you say thought clever, and every dress you put on becoming. These kind of things are wonderfully pleasant, and, as I have never had them before in my life, they make me feel happy. You know, Cecilia, that James and I are to be married in six weeks?"

"Yes, Helen, I know."

"You wish us happiness, don't you?"

"Of course, of course. Most earnestly I wish it."

"Thank you, Cecil. Yes, I am sure I shall be very happy. James is always telling me how much he loves me, and I think he grows nicer every day. I don't know what has changed him, but he is quite a different man from the Dr. Phillips whom you and I used to speak against long ago. Perhaps we didn't understand him long ago. Oh, how angry I was with him once about you and Laurence!"

"Let us forget that old affair, Helen."

"Yes, if you like, but I spoke to him about it one day, and he put things in a much pleasanter light. I should like to tell you what he said."

"And I would rather not hear." Cecilia put her hand to her forehead. "I am willing to believe that Dr. Phillips's explanation clears all mists away," she said, "but at the same time I don't want to listen to anything further on the subject. Believe me, Helen, it is forgotten both by my husband and myself."

"Cecilia," said Helen Lancaster, laying her hands on her

cousin's knee and looking at her with a world of entreaty in her face, "James and I are very anxious that Dr. Digby should come to Hartrick Street. James thinks most highly of your husband."

"Does he?" responded Cecilia. There were both sarcasm and doubt in her words. The coffee that Helena had given her had roused her out of the dormant state into which she had sunk after her extreme suffering of the night before. She remembered, though it seemed a far-off event, the queer, triumphant, malignant look in Phillips's eyes when he spoke of Hartrick Street and when he looked at her. The look in his eyes belied the words on his lips. She felt that she doubted and hated the man as much as ever, and yet she must keep all such feelings under for Helen's sake. Cecilia felt certain that Phillips did not really care for her husband; that Digby's advancement was the last thing he truly desired. This thought brought a fierce, angry throbbing to her tired heart. She felt a deep desire to show to Phillips how superior her learned and gifted husband was to him.

"What are you thinking of, Cecil? I know by the expression of your eyes that you are having some thoughts and that they are not very pleasant ones."

"I will forget them, dear Helen."

"Well," said Helen, "do let us talk of Hartrick Street. Would you not like to come and live there?"

"I should like it, I should like it dearly, but Laurence would think it a most mad step."

"I wish he would talk to James about it," said Helen. "You know that James is very rich; I believe he has more money than he knows what to do with."

"I have heard that he is rich."

"And he wants to help your husband," continued Helena. "Your husband has got a clew to something, I have not an idea what it is, which interests James very much. If James has a fault it is his ambition. He told me to-day that ambition—the desire to appear in a good light before the world—was so strong in his nature that he felt it to be almost a curse. He does say strange things now and then, and I fail to understand him, but I know he is anxious to help your husband. Perhaps he thinks they might both work this discovery, whatever it is, together. He said to me this afternoon that Dr. Digby had brains to any extent, but brains without money were very little use."

"That fact remains to be proved," said Cecilia, moving restlessly in her chair.

"Would not your husband talk to James about his discovery; that is, if he has a discovery?"

"You are talking very wildly, Helen," replied Cecilia, with a laugh; "I have not the least idea to what you allude."

"James did say——"

"Forgive me, Helen, I don't want to hear what James said. My husband is fond of making experiments, and he has a deep, great, and reverent love for science. If he has discovered anything new in the scientific world he has never told me about it, so I am quite sure that Dr. Phillips labors under a mistake. If he wishes us to come to Hartrick Street he must not run away with the idea that Laurence can promote his interest or add to his reputation in any way."

CHAPTER IV.

DIGBY'S DISCOVERY.

It was rather late on that same evening that Cecilia knocked at her husband's study door. He said "Come in," and she entered and came swiftly to his side.

"Laurence, you must put away your papers and books and listen to me. I have a great deal to say to you; I have some very important things to talk over."

Digby looked up at her with a long, affectionate gaze.

"Very well, my love," he said, "just allow me to score this passage and to put a mark into this volume, and I am at your disposal."

"How much you read, Laurence; how hard you study. There are wrinkles on your brow now; they come from hard reading and from much thought."

Digby smiled again. He took his wife's hand and raised it to his brow.

"Smooth the wrinkles out," he said.

She bent her head and kissed him.

"I could not live without my books and my study," he continued, after a pause. "They are my relaxations. One man finds pleasure in one thing, one in another. When I dip into these books I find the amusement that a man differently organized would take out of his club, out of a game of billiards, out of fifty other matters. Do you mind, Cecilia?"

"No," she replied, "I feel proud of your tastes."

She stood tall and straight beside his chair. Her hair, rather deeper in tone than of old, surrounded her thoughtful and spiritual type of face like a pale flame. There were shadowy lines under her eyes, and her mouth had the look of a tired and not altogether satisfied child.

Digby looked up at her, forgot himself at once, and began to speak in a professional tone.

"How stupid of me to keep you standing here," he said; "you look quite ill. My dear, I must talk to you as a doctor as well as a husband. You must try not to allow your feelings to get the better of you to the extent they did last night. I found you in an alarming state when I came from baby's room; it is wrong to use up emotion to the extent you do, Cecilia."

"Don't scold me, Laurie," she answered, in a gentle voice. "I was not quite so bad last night as I was the other time."

"What other time?"

"When I nearly killed Tommy Constantine. I did not faint last night."

"No; it might have been better if you had."

"It would not have been better. I kept consciousness, and that was everything. I have achieved a victory, though you don't seem to see it. Next time—oh, God! if there is to be a next time of such agony—I shall do better still."

Digby, who had risen and put his arm round his wife's waist, now moved a step or two from her side and watched her with anxiety.

"Come, come," he said, "let us stop heroics and descend to commonplaces. There is nothing I hate more than a woman going in for unhealthy self-examination. Your mother heart was tortured last night. My darling, it has been the will of God to stay his hand and to leave us our dear little girl. Let us think of no 'next time,' but come to the drawing room and be comfortable."

Cecilia's face grew bright.

"Will you spend the whole evening with me, Laurence?"

"I think I may promise to do so. I do not believe that I shall have a single case to attend to to-night."

"Then I will go and make the room lovely," said Cecilia.

She ran on before her husband, lit the candles in the drawing room—Digby hated gas—placed a great bowl of roses where her husband could see and smell them, put his arm—

chair where the faint summer breeze came in through the open window, and then stood in an expectant, eager attitude, waiting for him to enter the room and fill it with light and love.

Digby took possession of his chair with a sigh of relief.

"It is very nice to cast off all worries for a bit," he said. "Shall I read to you, Cecil? How are we to spend our two hours' holiday?"

"I want to talk," she answered, pulling a hassock forward and seating herself by his side.

"Well, darling, begin," he replied.

"First, about Babs. Are you anxious about her now, Laurence?"

"For the present I am not at all anxious, Cecilia. Little Nance had a bad and dangerous teething attack. I lanced her gums and she got relief. The cause of her attack of last night being removed, she is practically now quite well."

"Yes," answered Cecilia, "I saw her half an hour ago; she was in a heavenly sleep. There was a rosebud on her little cheek, and her hand, which she had thrown outside the coverlet, was like a half opened flower. She had a smile round her lips, as if she were having a very happy dream. I kissed her on her white forehead and whispered, 'Thank you, little Nance, for not going away to the angels.'"

"Cecilia, you are full of pretty and poetical thoughts, but your mind wants bracing. Be satisfied that baby is a thoroughly earthly little mortal, likely, with care, to lead a long life, and forget about the chance she ran of being an angel. Now, shall we go on with 'Barchester Towers'? I am interested in Mrs. Proudie, if you are not."

"I could not stand Mrs. Proudie to-night; she would jar on me. Laurie, I *must* talk to you."

"Well, my love, I am here to be talked to."

"I am not a scrap hysterical to-night, but I must know the truth."

"My dear," answered Digby, in a grave voice, "I invariably tell you the exact truth."

"Thank you, Laurence. Nothing rests me like that knowledge. Now for my question. Why did you ask me about my parents when baby was so ill?"

"Because I wanted to be guided to a right diagnosis of her case."

"But you were not; she was only teething."

"True; my fears were not realized."

"Your fears are gone now, are they not?"

"For the present they are, Cecilia. Baby is fast recovering her normal state of vigorous health."

"You do not think," pursued Cecilia, "that she inherits anything from my mother?"

Digby fidgeted in his chair.

"Is this a holiday, or is it not?" he asked. "If my mind is to be dissected, and you are to be the surgeon, we had better go back to my study."

"No, Laurence. You must not turn off my remarks with a light jest. I shall be as good and brave as any man can desire, but I must learn the truth."

"By Jove, you must!" said Digby. "What creatures women are! How persistent, how tenacious, how unreasonable! How unswerving of purpose! You know that at each footstep you tread on a sword, and yet you go on without faltering. Let me stand up, Cecilia"—she had placed her two hands on his knee. "If you will turn our holiday into a torture chamber, the fault lies on your own head."

He rose and stood over her. She did not attempt to get on her feet. She looked up at him from her half kneeling position. His words were spoken slowly; they fell on her ears with the relentless cruelty of an inexorable decree.

"Cecilia," said Digby, "our child undoubtedly inherits those seeds of death which laid your mother in her grave when she was still a young woman."

"Those seeds of death!" repeated Cecilia. She did not seem capable of comprehending her husband's words; her eyes looked as if she were dreaming.

"Those seeds of death," continued Digby, "that inherited taint which can show itself in a thousand ways. Your mother died from consumption. Consumption can take many cruel guises. It can declare itself in this form and in that. It can kill through the lungs, through disease of the throat; the brain can become affected—oh, I need not go on. Consumption is the greatest curse of the human race. If a cure could be found for it—a certain and radical cure—the discoverer would be the greatest benefactor of his race. Cecilia," continued Digby passionately, "when a cure is found for consumption half the tears that women shed will be wiped away—in short, that blessed time will be millennium."

"Yes," replied Cecilia; "girls such as I was before you

loved me and married me will not exist, and mothers such as I now am will not go about the world with broken hearts. But the cure is not found, Laurence. Dear, how white you look, how agitated; your hand—your strong, firm hand—trembles, and your eyes burn! There is fire behind, somewhere in your brain. What is the matter? You look as if you knew something. What is it? Can a cure be found for consumption?"

"I will tell you presently," replied Digby. "Don't excite yourself. There is nothing to make you very joyful. I wish, first of all, to speak about our little daughter. She had an attack of her brain last night. Such attacks are due either to pressure caused by teething, or a particular form of inflammation, which attacks a portion of the brain and which those born with the hereditary taint of consumption are particularly susceptible to."

"Then baby's attack of last night was not due to the—the hereditary taint?"

"No, thank God. She is well now. She may never have a similar attack to what so nearly took her off last night; but, all the same, she inherits the taint. All through her life it will imperil her. It is possible, just barely possible, that she may escape the worst attacks of the foe, but the fatal mischief is concealed in her system."

"Then shall I, too, die of consumption? I am well now; I am fairly strong."

"It is impossible to tell, Cecilia, whether you will escape or not. Up to the present you are free from any actual disease, but a trifling cold, a very slight neglect which would not affect another person in the least may bring you danger or even death. You must be very careful, and yet, with all your care, you may not escape the assaults of the foe."

"I do not mind for myself," said Cecilia, "but for Nance! Laurence, you ought never to have married me. People who inherit consumption ought not to marry."

"That is true. We married in haste. We loved each other. We acted as many poor fools have acted before, as many will act to the end of time."

"Oh, dear husband! we have been so happy." Cecilia rose now, and went up to Digby and put her slender arms round his neck. He pressed her slight form to his heart, and kissed her on her lips.

"Sit down again," he said. "The past is past; we have to

do what we can in the future. Sit down. Put your hand into mine. I want to think."

Digby shaded his eyes with his own big hand. The furrows on his brow were very marked as he sat in this position. The light from the candle shone on the silver hair on his temples. He was a young man still, not more than six-and-thirty, but his attitude just now was not that of youth.

"Cecilia," he said, after a pause, "there are more gray days than gold in life. It seems to me that a doctor sees all the gray and little of the sunshine."

"It is not like you to talk in that fashion, Laurence."

"No: but I am thinking of the child. I would give my life to save our child!"

"And so would I."

Digby was silent again for several minutes. Cecilia still felt in that sort of dream which paralyzes intense feeling. She had suffered so vividly the night before that now the worst suffering was not possible to her. She sat with her hands folded, her heart comparatively at rest, but with her brain actively working. After a little she touched her husband on his arm.

"Laurence, why did you look so excited when you spoke of a possible cure for one of the greatest curses of the human race? Oh," she added, jumping up suddenly, "have you got the threads in your hands? Is that—is that the discovery you have hinted at to me once or twice? If so, it has got wind in the profession. Helena came to me to-day, and said that Dr. Phillips was aware of your having partly discovered something—something of immense value to science."

"He said that?" exclaimed Digby. "Helena came to you with a message?"

"Well, not exactly with a message, only Dr. Phillips said that discoveries were worthless without money; he says that you have brains."

"He admits that at last!" exclaimed Digby. "His money and my brains shall never work in conjunction."

"I knew you would say something of that sort. I told Helena as much."

"You were right, Cecilia. I have an antipathy to that man. Of course, I should not stoop to quarrel with him, but as to making him my confidant—heaven forbid!"

"But you will tell me if there is any hope. You will tell me?"

"My dear, I do not know that there is the slightest hope."

"Laurence, you do know something."

"I will tell you a short story, Cecilia; you will take it for what it is worth."

"Yes, yes," she answered impatiently.

"Long ago, when first I entered the medical profession, some years before I met you, my dear, I had occasion to see patients who were suffering from scrofula, one of the common forms which this terrible disease takes. In making pathological observations I made a certain discovery, worth something or nothing, according to the views taken of it, and according to the results which I was able to produce. My discovery amounted to this: I saw that there was one constant element in all these cases of tubercular disease, and it flashed across me one day that this very element, which was never absent, if properly treated, might in itself contain the antidote to the disease. In short, I had something of the idea which Jenner employed so successfully in vaccination. It is difficult for me to go into all the medical terms with you. Suffice it to say that after many difficulties I produced a lymph which I thought might be employed as a preventative, if introduced into the human frame. Of course, the experiment in the first instance would be fraught with the greatest risk; in short, if I were to try my cure on a consumptive or scrofulous patient, death might be the result. I did not dare to try it. For many reasons I objected to making my experiment on animals, one of them being a certain reluctance to causing suffering, another the undoubted fact that the body of the animal differs in many essentials from the human frame. I thought, and thought, and at last I came to a bold resolve. My father and mother and sisters were all dead. I had no wife; I had no near relations. There was no one who would greatly sorrow if I died. It occurred to me that I would experiment on myself. I thought of this for several days; I knew well the danger which I must run, but my possible discovery, my possible great cure, haunted me day and night. I resolved at length to introduce the lymph into my own body. I prepared it carefully, and one day I made the experiment. In the course of time, fever followed. I was very ill. I lay almost at death's door for days, but in the end I slowly crept back to life and health.

"I was not deterred by these effects on my own frame from

making further experiments. When I became well again, I prepared more lymph, in a more diluted form. I introduced this into my body. There were no bad results whatever; I remained perfectly well. I wondered if the first dose I had administered had really killed the susceptibility to tubercular disease in my system. With a daring which many men might consider foolhardy, I made the poison strong, as strong as the first dose, and once more injected it under my skin. There were no results. I had no fever; I was in perfect health. I felt quite sure now that, as far as I was concerned, I was perfectly protected from the chance of developing any of the many forms of consumption."

Digby paused.

"Well, Laurence, go on! Tell me more. You surely didn't stop there? Your discovery was all but made. You tried it next on one of your patients, did you not?"

"No, my dear, I did not dare to do this. The discovery was but in its infancy. If I, a perfectly healthy subject, all but died from the effects of the first dose, a patient suffering from any form of the disease might die under the effects of the most remote portion of the poison which I should introduce into the system. I dared not risk the chance of such an appalling catastrophe, and from that day to this my discovery, or my half discovery, has lain useless, as far as the human race is concerned."

"But this is wicked of you! When you can save life, and avert so much misery, how dare you keep such a secret to yourself?"

"I always hope that I may live to perfect it," responded Digby. "Or if not I, some other and wiser man may take up my immature idea, and make use of it to bless the world. Up to the present, no further light has been given me. I wait patiently. In its present stage I dare not experiment; for in most cases, perhaps in every case, death, not cure, might be the result."

"You think I have got tubercular disease," said Cecilia, her eyes shining; "at least, you know that I have got the seeds of it within me. I would let you try on me; I would be a willing subject for you to experiment on."

"No, my darling. I would not dare to do this. You are too precious to me."

Digby rose from his chair, and began to pace restlessly up

and down the little drawing room. Cecilia rose too; she slipped her hand through his arm, and accompanied him in his walk.

"This discovery of yours, if perfected, might be the means of saving little Nance," she exclaimed.

"Undoubtedly it might."

"Why don't you work at it day and night?"

"I have never done thinking about it, but I can make very little way without endless experiments."

"And those?"

"Impossible, Cecilia. Do not let us discuss the subject any further."

Digby passed his hand wearily across his forehead.

"I am sorry our conversation has taken this dismal turn," he said, after a pause. "As regards baby, she is well at present. She will always require careful watching, but with that it is most unlikely that anything serious will occur for many years of her life. Consumption in many cases spares children. Long before little Nance even approaches maturity, my discovery may have developed and assumed a practical shape."

"God grant it!" exclaimed Cecilia. "I will pray about this day and night. What a benefactor you may be to the human race! To live for such an object is noble."

Digby's eyes shone with that fine fire which always filled them when his best instincts were raised.

"I would die in the cause," he said, in a low voice, "but that is not saying much."

"It is saying all," responded his wife proudly. "O Laurence, how deeply I love you!"

"I know you do," he said, stooping and kissing her. He was a man of few words and undemonstrative. Cecilia treasured up his caress as something to be remembered by and by.

"Now," he said, assuming a light and cheerful tone, "you brought me up here to talk about something quite different. What is it? What is at the back of your head, wife?"

"I want to go and live in Hartrick Street. There, I have said it." Cecilia's face was flooded all over with color, her eyes shone, her beautiful lips looked petulant and charming.

"I am amazed," said Digby, after a pause. "I did not think it was in you, Cecilia, to give up peace, no debts, a

contented mind, for ambition, large money responsibilities, and discontent."

"No, no. I wish for the change for none of these things: it is because you are buried here—buried! You have no patients who appreciate you."

"I deny that, Cecil. My patients not only appreciate me, they love me."

"Yes, yes, all those poor folk, those middle class people. Any other doctor would do as well for them."

"They also give me a living, Cecilia. I make from four to five hundred a year in this place. If I took a house in Hartrick Street, I should expend some thousands, or rather I should run up debts to that amount, and have no returns to meet them. My dear, if I could afford it I would go there. As it is——"

"Laurence, all your friends advise you to go."

"I don't understand you. What friend, unless it is my wife, has deliberately asked me to cut my throat?"

"If you *will* look at it in that way I have nothing more to say," answered Cecilia, half pouting. "The Lancasters think you ought to go, and so does Dr. Phillips."

"A fig for Phillips. He has no right to make use of the word 'ought' as concerns my life."

"I will confess the truth to you," said Cecilia, after a pause. "It is principally because of Dr. Phillips that I want you to go. I hate him, and I know he hates you. I know also that in his heart of hearts he does not want you to succeed. It is possible that he may wish to have you near him in order to share the glory of your discovery, but, apart from that, he has no good desires toward you. You know, Laurence, how superficial he is. You know that he has not a spark of originality in him. His genius compared to yours 'is like water unto wine.' Why should he succeed, and you—and you fail?"

"If I stay quietly here, Cecil, I shall not fail, according to my ideas of failure. I shall live an honorable and contented life. As the years go on I shall have a larger and larger practice—not among the rich and powerful, but among the poor and sorrowful. As far as money is concerned, my gains will not be considerable, but do you think nothing of all the 'God bless you's' that a doctor can get, of the love he can inspire, and the suffering he can lessen? My dear, it is possible, it is just possible, to find a man now and then who thinks more of these things, to whom they are better and a

brighter crown than mere money. I can go to Hartrick Street, Cecilia, and, taking the brightest view of the question, I may even be successful there, and yet miss that little wreath of laurels that I covet."

CHAPTER V.

THE WINDOW DODGE.

WHEN a man wishes to do one thing and a woman earnestly desires him to do another, if the woman is clever and he is fond of her, the chances are that, little by little, she pulls him in the direction to which her own desires tend. He may be a man of the most unswerving rectitude of purpose, he may be firm as adamant, and may be almost obstinate in making up his mind, and sticking to his opinion when it is expressed. Still, the clever woman whom he loves will influence him in the end according to her own desires.

If she is diplomatic, she will effect this end more quickly than if she fails in this quality, but in any case she will succeed.

Digby hated going in debt. He disliked anything even approaching to ostentation. He was not ambitious. He was a man who in many respects felt old before his time; he took life with the patient gravity of one who knows that he can only do a little, a very little, to lift the dark curtain of suffering which envelops so many lives.

To such a man fame had little charm and riches were not alluring; but there was a glint which he missed out of Cecilia's bright eyes. To bring that back again he would sacrifice sweet content and a humble, happy, unembarrassed home for all the cares which must accompany a man who deliberately chooses to live beyond his means.

Cecilia's first talk with Digby on the subject of the house in Hartrick Street was followed by many others. She was patient but persistent in her efforts to bring him to see the folly of living shut away from the world.

One day she made him yield to the extent of going to see the house. He pronounced it depressing, dark, a great deal too large, and badly drained.

Cecilia had an answer to every objection. The landlord would repaint, repaper, redecorate. He would also resanitate from attic to cellar.

Digby sighed, but he accompanied his wife to the house which Phillips was now making beautiful for the reception of his pretty bride.

Digby acknowledged that Phillips's house looked very nice.

"We will have just such a paper in our drawing-room," said Cecilia; "that soft pale, china tone of blue rests the eye so delightfully."

"I did not know, Cecil," replied Digby, "that you cared for this sort of thing. This new side of your character puzzles and bewilders me."

In reply to this speech Cecilia looked carefully behind her. She and her husband were standing alone in Phillips's beautiful drawing room.

"Laurence," she whispered, "I think of all these things, I make my mind full of them, to shut away that knowledge you gave me the other night about baby and myself."

"You forced me to tell you," replied Digby. "Now that you know, it is your duty to forget as far as lies in your power."

"Then give me this house, make me its mistress, and give me also a husband whom men and women will talk of with pride as one of the greatest and best men in his profession."

"And so your heart is really set on this, Cecilia?" he answered, and a harassed, worried, disappointed expression came into his eyes.

The next day Dr. and Mrs. Digby paid a visit to the agent in whose hands the letting of the house was. They then went home to Coxmoor Street, and Digby asked Cecilia gravely how she contemplated furnishing the new house.

"For the things we have here," he said, "might fit comfortably in a corner of one of the big rooms. Is the rest of the house to go empty?"

Cecilia had thought a great deal about the furnishing. Her quick mind had leaped on, many times, to the moment when Digby would show her the lease of the house in Hartrick Street all duly signed and attested. She was not going to divulge her plans just now. She stooped down, and, taking up little toddling Nance, held her so that she might play with Digby's grizzled hair.

"The furnishing must be managed," said Cecilia, "but there is time enough. Baby has brought you a letter, Laurence. Read it, and forget your worries."

Digby having no relations but his wife and child had also a very scant correspondence, and the words "a letter for you" roused his interest. He took both baby and letter into his arms, and Cecilia went out of the room to prepare the tea.

When she came back Digby and Nance were having a game of ball together, the crumpled up envelope of the letter being extemporized into a ball for the occasion.

Little Nance had a merry laugh, like a clear, silver bell. She could use her sturdy legs well, and Digby's awkward attempts to catch the ball provoked exquisite mirth on the part of baby.

Cecilia brought in the tea herself, and began to pour it out. The open letter lay on the table by her side. Her eyes rested on it. Digby was under the table catching the ball, and Babs was rolling about on the floor and chuckling.

Cecilia took up the letter and read it.

"Laurence!" she exclaimed, in a sharp, surprised voice.

"Yes, my love? Give me one minute—ah, here it is—now, Nance, catch! Hold out your arms, monkey. Now then—what, missed again? Yes, Cecilia, what is it?"

"Only this letter," said Cecilia.

Digby rose and seated himself once more in his favorite armchair.

"Come here, Nance," he said. He took his little daughter in his arms, and covered her soft face and sweet, white neck with kisses.

"You have read the letter, Cecil?" he said then, putting one arm round the little child, who looked at him with an earnest, half grave, half amused, expression. "Yes, I see that you have read the letter. I thought you would be pleased. It's more than I am. Of course, that clinches the Hartrick Street matter. Hey-ho, Nance! how many games of ball will we have together when we find ourselves weighed down with responsibility, when we sit waiting for patients who don't come—for the East End doctor has no place in the West. Now, my love, what is it? Nance, run to your mother and comfort her."

Digby got up, and placed the child in his wife's arms.

"I see that I must go to Hartrick Street, Cecilia," he said, "and, once the die is cast, I promise you I won't groan any more."

For the letter in Cecilia's hand contained news of a wind-

fall. An old friend of his mother's had left Digby a thousand pounds.

"We can furnish the house now," said Cecilia gladly. "Laurence, the day will come when you will be proud to know that you followed your wife's wishes. In this matter I am positive that I am right. It is an absolute sin for you, a man with your abilities, to bury yourself in Coxmoor Street."

"I am going to emerge from my retirement," replied Digby. "Right or wrong, I obey the voice which prompts me and impels me; I say nothing more of my feelings in the matter. But, Cecil, you are, after all, a very ignorant little woman of the world; for how far do you think a thousand pounds will go in furnishing a house like the one in Hartrick Street?"

Cecilia opened her gray eyes very wide.

"A thousand pounds seems to me unlimited wealth," she replied. "I can scarcely grasp the idea of anyone spending a whole thousand pounds on any single thing, even on house furnishing. Surely, Laurence, we shall use about half this money and have a lovely house?"

"Wait and see," replied Digby, laughing. "Go to Maple, or Shoolbred, or Whiteley, and after a talk with them come and tell me again what you can effect with our legacy. Now, my dear, there is a ring at my patients' bell. I told Harper to look round this evening. Poor fellow, he doesn't seem to get much better."

Digby left the room, and Cecilia sat down and began to play with Nance, and to dream of the good time that was coming.

Unlike most wives of medical men, she knew something of most of her husband's patients: she was keenly interested in them. She visited many of them, and did more good by her sympathy than Digby did by his medicines. Harper, a waterman on the Thames, was a special favorite of hers. On ordinary occasions she would have been distressed at her husband's report of the poor man's health, but to-night her thoughts were far away. She was dazzled by the bright picture she believed to be before her, and for the first time she felt absolutely certain that ambition occupied a very large part of her character.

The next morning Cecilia put on her bonnet, and dressing Nance in a charming little summer costume, took the child in her arms, and walked with her to King's Cross. She intended to pay her friend Miss Timmins a visit.

In due time Mrs. Digby and her little daughter arrived at Miss Timmins's humble door. Cecilia rang the bell at the wicket gate, and, as she did years before, Miss Timmins replied to the summons herself. She gave a scream of delight when she saw Cecilia and Nance.

"Come in, come in, my dear," she exclaimed. "How sweet of you, Cecilia, to bring baby. This is sunshine indeed. But, my dear love, I have nothing to give you for dinner."

"What does this basket contain?" asked Cecilia, laughing. "Dinner for Babs, dinner for you, dinner for me. It is such a lovely day, can't we eat it in the garden at the back of your house?"

"No, no, my dear, we will have our dinner in the parlor. Cecilia, how well you look, how bright; and baby is the very bonniest creature. My love, is it true that this little one has been seriously ill?"

Cecilia's bright face changed color.

"A thing of the past," she exclaimed hurriedly; "a teething attack. My dear doctor soon put her right. Doesn't she look strong, Miss Timmins?"

Miss Timmins examined little Nance critically.

"My love," she replied, "I am not a mother, but I have had plenty to do with babies in my time, and I can confidently say I never saw a firmer and finer child."

Cecilia ran up to the old lady and kissed her.

"You make my heart rejoice," she said. "Nance, put your arms round dear old Aunt Abigail's neck and give her a hug."

Nance, who had been standing by her mother, toddled gravely over to Miss Timmins.

"I tiss oo," she said, "cos oo's dood, but oo's not pitty."

She raised her cherub lips, and Miss Timmins caught her in her arms and smothered her with kisses.

"Hark to the sweet little lamb!" she said. "Cecilia, I wonder what life would be like if we kept as truthful all our days as when we are eighteen months old?"

Cecilia sighed, and a puzzled expression crept over her face.

"I cannot go into metaphysics to-day," she exclaimed. "I have come here to consult you. We are going away from Coxmoor Street. We have taken a house, or we are about to take a house, in Hartrick Street. You know Hartrick

Street? It is the place where all the doctors who mean to become anything live. Laurence will soon get a good set of patients when we have settled ourselves in the right quarter. A legacy has been left to my husband of a thousand pounds. With that sum we will furnish the house. I know you live in a very small house, dear Miss Timmins, but I have also heard you say that at one time of your life you have had plenty to do with rich people and their ways. Can you help me to furnish my house?"

Now no proposition that Cecilia could make was more likely to please Miss Timmins. The thought of helping this young wife and mother to make her new house charming would have fascinated most lonely old maids. Miss Timmins had come to think Cecilia Digby and her little daughter Nance the two dearest people in the world. Her old heart had entwined itself round them. She was old herself, but in her contact with these two her heart had grown young and strong and fresh. She looked at Cecilia now from head to foot; then her eyes wandered to the pretty little Nance, then again they sought the mother's fresh and charming face.

"I am sorry you are going to Hartrick Street," she exclaimed.

"Oh, don't begin that plaint," said Cecilia. "I have gone through all that. Laurence and I have talked over the pros and cons until we are both weary. It is all my doing. Laurence would rather remain in obscurity, but I have urged him, I have persuaded, I have prevailed. I am willing to take all the responsibility of this step, and I won't listen to any more argument about it. If my friends disapprove, they must be silent. My mind is irrevocably made up. We go to Hartrick Street, and Laurence fights for his position among men of his own standing; he meets his peers in the world of intellect, and has the same chance as other clever men."

"Your husband has not the same chance," responded Miss Timmins, in a very grave voice, "for, unless I mistake, he is without capital. A doctor without capital is always at a disadvantage. I know that, my dear, for my father was a clever but unsuccessful medical man."

"Oh," said Cecilia, "Laurence's case shall be without precedent. He has no capital, but he shall succeed."

She spoke defiantly, and crimson spots rose to each of her cheeks. Miss Timmins gazed at her in a sort of bewilder-

ment, then she rose from her chair, and said in a solemn voice:

"God forgive you, Cecilia Digby. You have astonished me to-day. God grant you may never repent of this."

Cecilia turned pale; she got up from her chair, and put out her hand, which slightly trembled, to grasp that of little Nance.

"So you won't help me, Miss Timmins?" she said.

"Sit down again, my love. I will help you with all my heart. I have had my say. If the die is cast, it is useless to waste words over the matter. Now to business. What size is your house?"

After this the two women had a long and interesting discussion. Miss Timmins rose to the occasion, and showed herself in an absolutely new light. She brought forward vast stores of hidden knowledge, and surprised Cecilia with the record of the past, which might help the young wife and mother now in the bold experiment she was about to make.

"Cecilia," said Miss Timmins, "times change, no doubt, but neither in the past nor now could a certain sum of money be got to purchase more than a certain supply of goods. There is no doubt, my dear, that a thousand pounds will not furnish your house as it ought to be furnished. You must not dream of going in debt for even sixpence-worth. There is nothing whatever for it but to try the window dodge."

"What is that?" asked Cecilia, laughing.

"Well, my love, we did it. It had a most excellent effect, and no one ever knew. You are going into a very big house, and, after all, you and your husband and your child are not very big people. You don't really want more room than you have in that sweet little home in Coxmoor Street. Now, my dear, we will do this: We will furnish one room handsomely as a waiting room for the doctor's patients. The large sitting room you describe at the back of the house will, of course, be the consulting room. That also must be richly appointed. The entrance hall shall be as select as possible in all its arrangements, and the stairs leading up to the drawing room floor must be richly carpeted. The drawing room for the present must remain empty. But it is necessary that the kitchen should be furnished, for you must be well fed, Cecilia, and so must your child, and, above all things, so must your husband. You will get a good cook, and unless cooks are changed from what they were in the old days when I

was young, she will not deny herself. Whoever suffers in the house, the cook must have saucepans, frying pans, and cupboards and larders to meet her requirements. I should think, my dear, that the furniture you now have would be quite sufficient for your bedroom in the new house, and that with a additional outlay Babs' little room can also be made charming for her."

"But what about the window dodge?" said Cecilia.

"I am coming to that, my dear. You are now, Cecilia, leaving the House of Truth in Coxmoor Street to come to the House of Humbugs in Hartrick Street."

"Oh, don't," said Cecilia. "I didn't know you were so painfully satirical, Miss Timmins."

"My dear, I have had a turn at everything in my time, even at satire. Your husband is to pose as a man of wealth; he is to appear as a prosperous physician. You must not forget that in Hartrick Street you will have neighbors, that your neighbors will have many eyes, and from all those eyes they will peer at you, and endeavor by every means in their power to pick holes in you. I mean, my dear, that from the windows of the opposite houses the barrenness of your house will be viewed unless we are very careful. The rooms may remain empty, Cecilia, but the windows must be furnished. To every window there must be a nice, fresh, clean, fashionable blind; behind every window there must hang a pair of curtains. Each day your blinds must be raised to a certain level, and your curtains must be freshly draped. The neighbors will then suppose that the house is fully furnished, and that Dr. Digby is a rich man. How can I call the house in Hartrick Street anything else but the House of Humbugs?"

Miss Timmins laughed as she spoke, and Cecilia laughed too; but there was something hollow and forced in the sound of her mirth.

"I don't know how Laurence will quite bear that," she exclaimed.

"My dear, you really must not worry your husband about the furnishing of your house. You and I must do that. If ever there was a true man on this earth it is your brave, noble husband. There never was a more lucky woman than you. In your husband you have got something far more precious than gold—far more valuable than fame. O Cecilia, I have always loved you since that day, nearly four years ago now, when you came to me so forlorn, so sweet, so full of the best

impulses. How glad I was when you told me you were to marry that brave, good husband of yours. Since then you have changed, my dear; you are still sweet, but you have changed. Never mind, I promised not to preach, and I will go with you, and be your friend through thick and thin. Now to return to the house. We will make a lovely house as far as a thousand pounds go, and your good husband must not be worried. Suppose we have dinner now, my dear, and afterward shall we go and pay Shoolbred a visit?"

CHAPTER VI.

THE ROAD TO SUCCESS.

MISS TIMMINS was as good as her word. She helped Cecilia through all the thick and thin of that house furnishing. Each day the young woman and the old spent many hours together. They went to furnishing shops in each other's company, they compared the value of this carpet and of that, of this style of decoration and the other. Miss Timmins brought out of its grave a taste which had long been buried, an eye for the beautiful which no one gave her credit for possessing. She knew not only how to make a penny produce its utmost value in the money market, but she also knew where green would harmonize with drab, and where the slightest touch of pink would render the pale blue decoration of a certain room absolutely bright and charming. Cecilia had in reality a more artistic eye than her friend, but she had not Miss Timmins's vast store of old-world experience. The two together found themselves fully equal to the business of making Digby's house one of the most attractive in Hart-rick Street.

The doctor knew very little of what was going on; he saw that Cecilia was happy and busy, he knew that Nance was well, and he himself was occupied just now during every moment of his time; for the poor people whom he visited determined that they would not part with their favorite doctor for nothing. In some extraordinary way they each of them managed to develop his or her pet malady, and Digby had his hands full, although these labors did not materially increase the weight of his purse.

It is an acknowledged fact in the medical profession that men who cannot afford to purchase a practice must climb the

ladder of success by slow and painful toil. No matter how clever a poor doctor is, it is impossible for him to compete with his moneyed brother. The one just steps into the shoes of a doctor who has already secured a great number of patients; the other man has to find his patients one by one for himself.

Digby in this case was the other man. When he married Cecilia he took the little house in Coxmoor Street, and for some time visited the very poor people in his district for nothing. By degrees one neighbor told another of the doctor with the rugged face, the brusque word, the genial smile, and the clever diagnosis. They spoke to each other of the cures Digby had effected, and so one after another called him in, and he made a practice for himself sufficient to keep the little house in Coxmoor Street going.

His practice was valuable enough now to tempt another man to purchase it from him for a few hundred pounds. One day the doctor told his wife with pride that he had put enough money away in the bank to meet the first year's rent of their house in Hartrick Street.

Cecilia glanced at him eagerly when he said this. After a pause, she went up and kissed him. Some words crowded to her lips, but she did not utter them. He returned her embrace, looking at her sadly. He often looked sad just now, as if he were troubled by a foreboding.

At last the day came when the Digbys said adieu to the humble but happy little home where Nance had first seen the light. They went to Hartrick Street, and established themselves there just one month after Helena and her husband had returned from their wedding tour.

Helena rushed in to see her friend the first evening, and exclaimed joyfully at the beauty of the house.

"You have more taste than I have, Cecil," she said. "James went over your house with me yesterday, and he was particularly struck with the window dodge."

"The window dodge!" exclaimed Digby. "What do you mean, Helena?"

"Don't, don't, Helen," said Cecilia, laughing. "I have not yet told the doctor of the window dodge. It must be broken to him gently. You will scarcely believe me when I tell you that Laurence has only visited his consulting room and the dining room up to the present."

"Time enough to see all the rest of this great palace by

and by," said Digby, with a sigh. "Heigh-ho! I suppose I shall get used to it in time, but I feel very much like a fish out of water at the present moment."

Helena, whose pretty face was radiant with happiness, looked at Digby as he spoke.

"I never knew that Cecilia's husband was so old," she mentally soliloquized. "The hair round his temples was always a little gray, now it is white. And yet what power there is in his face, what endurance. Oh, of course, he isn't a bit handsome, but I do like to look at him. If I were ill it would comfort me were he to prescribe for me."

Helen and Cecilia talked idle nothings together for nearly an hour, then Phillips came in to fetch his wife, and also to criticise the new arrangements.

"I am thoroughly delighted," he said, in a cordial tone. "You will never regret this step, Digby, old man."

Digby winced when Phillips addressed him as old man. He did not care to be on terms of intimacy with Helena's husband, and yet it was difficult for him to reject advances made for some reason or other in a thoroughly cordial spirit.

"You will have more patients than you know how to manage by this time next year, Digby," pursued Phillips, "but, now you have begun, you must go on to the end properly. What about your carriage—have you ordered it yet?"

"Certainly not," replied Digby; "I have not the least intention of burdening myself with the expense of a carriage."

"But you must go to see your patients in a brougham."

"At present I have no patients to see."

"You will have some to-morrow. Sir Probyn Sharpe was speaking to me this afternoon. He said his daughter was consumptive. I told him that the treatment of consumption was your special hobby, and he intends to ask Lady Sharpe to bring the girl round to see you to-morrow. She will do for number one. I have some other friends to whom I shall mention you as a specialist."

"But I am not a specialist," replied Digby.

"My dear fellow, then I shall speak of you as a right good, clever, rather eccentric, sort of man. Women love eccentric doctors. Leave the matter to me."

"It is lovely of you to be so kind," said Cecilia suddenly. Her eyes sparkled, her cheeks glowed; she looked so radiant, so beautiful that Phillips could not help bestowing upon her a broad stare of admiration.

"By Jove!" he said under his breath. "Does Digby know what a beautiful woman that slim little probationer of three years ago has become?"

Digby saw Phillips's glance; he frowned—felt within himself that he could not possibly be cordial, and, rising from the table with a word of apology, withdrew into the consulting room.

"James," said Helen, when the door closed behind Digby, "you must please to understand that Cecilia's husband must be caught by guile. Don't tell him what you are doing for him, only do it."

"I shall certainly have the greatest pleasure in helping Digby by every means in my power," responded Phillips. "I feel to a certain extent responsible for him, as I urged him to take this step. But, Mrs. Digby, it is absolutely necessary that your husband should start a carriage. If he is afraid of the expense just at first, let him hire a brougham at one of the livery stables near. He must have a brougham, no matter how plain. Then, have you thought of a man to open the door for the patients? A man looks ever so much better than a maidservant."

"I know Laurence will not go to that expense," replied Cecilia, her pretty brows contracting with anxiety.

"Dear me, James! Is not a carriage enough for poor Cecil to think over the first evening of her arrival here?" asked his wife.

"No, my dear, no. Everything must be put on a proper footing at once. You have taken a bold step, Mrs. Digby, and success mainly depends on your not faltering now at the critical juncture. Your husband must have his carriage and his manservant. Let me see—why should you worry a man like that about such trifles? I can order the carriage for you, and I believe that I can get you a servant to come for a few hours every morning at quite a small rate of wage. Lady Sharpe will most likely bring her daughter to-morrow, and it would certainly be advisable that a man accustomed to the sort of thing should open the door."

"We cannot have a man by to-morrow," said Cecilia, frowning.

"Won't you leave it to James and me, Cecil?" exclaimed Helena.

"No, no," said Cecilia. "Laurence commissioned me to furnish the house for him. We had a little money left us,

and we spent it on the furnishing, but if I were to order a carriage for him, and to hire a manservant, he would naturally be very angry. It cannot be done."

"Forgive me, Mrs. Digby," exclaimed Phillips; "we are going to be near neighbors. My wife cares more for you than for any other woman in existence—had we not better establish a friendly footing without delay? Helen will tell you of her difficulties—why should you not confide in Helen, and, if necessary, in Helen's husband? I may as well say at once that I am a thorough man of the world. We all know that Digby is not a man of the world, and yet for his own sake, for the sake of the profession, for your sake and your child's, we want to push him into a position which he scarcely cares to occupy. He must not be worried by details. His mind is occupied with great problems, and to harass it with such subjects as the petty expenditure of money necessary for everyday life would be cruel. Now, the long and short of this preamble is—have you any money in the bank?"

"I believe Laurence has put by a year's rent. He got a small sum for the little practice he made while in Coxmoor Street, and I also think there is about a hundred pounds left after paying the furnishing bills."

Phillips's brow cleared.

"So far, so good," he said. "Helen, come home with me now: I have a plan to discuss with you. Mrs. Digby, my wife will pay you a visit early to-morrow morning."

The result of Phillips's conference with his young wife proclaimed itself in a very practical manner on the following day.

Helena told Cecilia that her husband knew the master of some livery stables who would supply the Digbys with a neat brougham, nice horse, and man in livery, who would appear at one o'clock every day at No. 48 Hartrick Street.

"What for?" asked Cecilia, in amazement.

"Because," said Helena gravely, "your husband must be seen at that hour every day going the round of his patients. The neighbors must see him doing this. James says that is essential."

"O Helen, Helen!" exclaimed Cecilia, suddenly bursting into tears, "Miss Timmins was right when she called this the House of Humbugs."

"Don't cry," said Helen, in a pained voice. "James says there is nothing in all this, it is simply one of the roads to

success. Your husband will have real patients to visit in a fortnight or a month from now."

"Then who is to pay for the brougham?" exclaimed Cecilia. "The little money we have in the bank ought to be kept for housekeeping expenses and rent. I thought the matter all over last night, and I saw clearly that it would be very wrong to touch the money in the bank until Laurence has paying patients who will bring him in a good income; we must keep something to buy bread and butter with."

"You poor Cecil," exclaimed her friend, "you ought to have mamma's turn for management. You can't imagine how far she makes a thousand pounds go in a year."

"But we have not a thousand pounds," replied Cecilia. "At the present moment we have scarcely any money to spend, for Laurence has quite made up his mind that the year's rent is not to be touched on any account whatever."

"Well, what about the carriage?"

"Is the carriage necessary?"

"My dear, it is indispensable. James knows; he would not take all this trouble for your husband if he was not absolutely certain about the necessity of what he is doing. The carriage shall not cost you much, Cecil."

"How much?" continued Cecilia.

"That is just it. You are not going to be angry; you must just listen to my scheme. You must know that James and I were very anxious to give you a little present to help your house furnishing. We had always made up our minds to do this, for you cannot forget that you are my cousin and my dearest friend. We were quite distressed when we went over your house and saw how cleverly you had done it up. James said, 'There is absolutely not a single thing they want. The rooms on the ground floor are irreproachable, and those cleverly decorated windows upstairs reveal nothing of the skeleton behind. What are we to do?'

"Those were my husband's words," pursued Mrs. Phillips. "Then when we came home last night he said to me, 'Suppose we pay for Cecilia's carriage' (we always speak of it you know, darling, as *your* carriage), 'for the first three months.' James said that your husband would probably make no inquiries about it; he would be satisfied if you told him that the money part of the matter was all right. Do, do let us give you your carriage for three months, Cecil, just as a little private gift from James and me. James says that long before

the three months are up Dr. Digby will be able to pay the expense of his own brougham."

"I must think," said Cecilia, "I must think it over. You are kind, you tempt me, but is it necessary for me to keep this thing from Laurence?"

"Dear Cecil," replied Helen, "that rests with yourself. If your husband does not object to our gift, by all means tell him. If he does object, please, please, for the sake of the future, keep the knowledge to yourself."

"But that would be doing wrong," said Cecilia. "Oh, I am tempted, but I hate doing wrong. Dear little Helen, I did not think you would be the one to tempt me."

Helen raised her brown eyes, and looked full at her cousin.

"I will not tempt you any more," she said suddenly. "I will leave it to your own judgment. James says that it isn't *absolutely* necessary that the brougham should appear at your door this afternoon, as the neighbors will know that you have only just arrived—but to-morrow! You have only just to send me a line, Cecil, or, better still, run in to see me, and the brougham, beautifully appointed, will stand before your door between one and two o'clock."

"Go away now," said Cecilia, turning white. "You make me feel almost wild; my heart beats too fast; Laurence will say that I am feverish. What possible excuse can I make to account for that brougham? That brougham has already assumed the guise of a nightmare. O Helen, I am grateful to you, and to—to James, but the House of Humbugs is already taking the life out of my soul."

"I do not understand you," replied Helen. "You seem to me to be something like a shuttlecock. You are anxious for your husband to succeed, and then you almost reject the help that your friends try to give you."

"Do not be angry with me."

"No, no, I cannot be that."

"Your heart has never been torn like mine."

"I suppose not; I feel very happy."

Cecilia accompanied her cousin to the door. Just as Helen was leaving the house she turned suddenly round.

"I was nearly forgetting," she said: "we have found a delightful man who has something to do in the Post Office. He helps to carry round letters in the afternoon. He is a sort of supernumerary, and can come to you in livery for three

hours every morning. You need only pay him ten shillings a week, and he won't require any food."

Cecilia held up her hands.

"Ten shillings a week!" she exclaimed. "How are we to find that?"

Helen could not help laughing.

"My dear," she remarked, "James says he never heard of anyone so cheap in his life. O Cecil! what a job it will be to drag you and your husband up the steep hill of success which leads to wealth and fame."

Helen went back to her own home, and Cecilia shut the hall door and returned to her beautiful dining room. Her little child was sitting on the floor. She lifted her pretty face to her mother's for a kiss. Nance was not elated by the new house. The shabby parlor in Coxmoor Street suited her bricks better than the grand new dining room in Hartrick Street. The new floor was highly polished, and the bricks would tumble down, missing the friendly support of the old drugget in the other home.

"Naughty b'icks, Nan hates you!" exclaimed the child. "Nan not p'ay any more."

She ran up to her mother, who took her up in her arms and kissed her.

"Does Nance like the new house?" asked Cecilia.

"No," answered the child, "noo house not pitty." Then she put her arms tightly round her mother's neck. "Take Nan back to old house," she asked, in a piteous voice.

Cecilia pressed the little creature to her heart.

"The House of Truth suits you and father better than this house, Nance," she said, in a smothered voice of pain.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PARLOR MAID AT FORTY-EIGHT.

It was the beginning of October when the Digbys found themselves in their new house. It was not the height of the season, but neither was it exactly a dull time. The holiday-makers were coming back to town, the public schools had received their pupils back again, and there was a general stir and movement in the streets which had been so empty and deserted a short time ago.

The weather was lovely just now. There was a freshness,

clearness, and crispness in the atmosphere which were most exhilarating. Cecilia's new house had no dust anywhere; the furniture looked spick and span, the tiled hall was wide and handsome, and the light streamed down in rich bars of color from the painted window on the first landing.

Cecilia's heart was beating quickly. This was the first morning of her great venture. Right or wrong, the deed was now done which separated her and hers from mediocrity and Coxmoor Street. Helen had roused some latent qualms of conscience when she made her proposals about the brougham, but that subject might wait for future consideration; the present great necessity was to get ready for the expected visit of Lady Sharpe.

No man in livery could open the door that morning. Cecilia was a perfect novice in the ways of society. She had taken a big house, but she had no staff of servants at her command. Sally Jenkins, the maid of all work in Coxmoor Street, was now promoted to the post of cook in Hartrick Street. Nance had her own special, devoted nurse, who was generally known by the affectionate title of Henny-Penny. Henny-Penny was an excellent sort of girl, but she was short and dumpy in figure, and had never worn a cap in her life. Sally Jenkins was also the reverse of presentable as a hall porter.

Cecilia felt quite staggered when she reflected on Lady Sharpe's feelings when either Henny-Penny or Sally Jenkins opened the door for her.

"She may go away again," reflected Mrs. Digby in horror. "There is no saying what effect Henny-Penny may have on her; she may fancy that Dr. Phillips gave her the wrong address. Oh, how dreadful, how perfectly dreadful, if poor Henny-Penny is to be the means of ruining Laurence's future prospects."

Cecilia reflected for a few moments; then she came to a sudden resolve.

"I'll do it," she said to herself. "No one need ever know. I'll watch behind the blind in the empty drawing room, and when Lady Sharpe's carriage drives up I'll open the door myself. I must go out now immediately and order something for dinner; I can buy a neat parlor maid's cap and apron at the same time. I expect I shall make a rather pretty parlor maid, and Lady Sharpe need never know. First of all, how-

ever, I must go and remind Laurence that a patient is coming to see him."

Cecilia tripped away to her husband's consulting room. He was having a thoroughly happy morning putting drawers to rights and turning over piles of papers and books. He was in an old tweed suit very much the worse for wear; his grizzled locks were standing up high on his forehead.

"O Laurence!" exclaimed his wife, "you are not going to see Lady Sharpe in that coat?"

"Has she come, my dear?" asked Digby. "Don't stand there please, Cecilia; there are some dried crabs in that parcel, and you may crush them."

"Oh, dear, dear! Laurence, you ought to put all these messy things away. Lady Sharpe will think the room looks so odd."

"Is she in the dining room? I can see her there."

"No, no; she hasn't come at all yet."

"Then what are you fussing over?"

"You ought to be ready. You ought to have your nice black professional coat on, and the room ought to be tidy, not in this awful litter. Dear Laurence, you must really tidy both yourself and the room."

"And sit with my hands folded before me, waiting for this grand Lady something or other? No, thank you. Look here, my dear wife, you can never convert me into a sleek counterpart of James Phillips. Do you want to try?"

"No, Laurence; no, no!"

"I must go my own way; and my patients must take me as they find me. If any people do happen to call to see me this morning, which I much doubt, I shall receive them in my old tweed suit, and they will see the unknown East End doctor busy sorting his specimens, and putting them in order; for, whatever else happens, Cecilia, however the old order may change, you will never convert me into a sham. Now run away, my dear, for I happen to be very busy."

"How will he bear it when he hears about the brougham?" thought Cecilia as she left the room.

She stood for a moment in the passage to think; then she ran up to her own luxurious bedroom, and putting on her hat and jacket, slung a small basket over her arm, and running downstairs let herself out.

Cecilia was probably the first lady who had lived at 48 Hartrick Street who deliberately went out to do her own mar-

keting. She turned into a side street, made the necessary purchases for the house, then entering a small draper's shop bought a cheap and pretty housemaid's cap and a neat apron. She returned home with her purchases, let herself into the house with her latchkey, and ran down to Sally Jenkins, who was overpowered with the grandeur of her new position as queen of the kitchen department. Sally was inclined to have a long, confidential talk with Mrs. Digby, but Cecilia had no time to listen to her.

"There, Sally, you can't possibly want anything more for to-day!" she exclaimed, laying her different packages on the table. "There is meat for a nice hash, and vegetables to put with it, and here are eggs, and—and—oh, you can open all the other parcels by yourself, Sally. Put your wits to work, and give us a nice little dinner. What is that you say about late dinner as well? No, not at present. I will think about that later on. Now, I can't stay a moment. I am much pressed for time."

She ran up to her own room, peeped into the nursery as she passed, and saw that Henny-Penny was putting on little Nance's outdoor things to take her for a walk.

"That is right!" she exclaimed cheerfully. "You are not far from Regent's Park here, Henny. Take Miss Nance there, and give her a good blow."

Then Cecilia locked herself into her bedroom; she was trembling slightly, for she felt that she was about to do a daring thing. She opened one of her drawers and took from it a neat but plain print dress. This she put on, fastening a linen collar at her throat, and slipping linen cuffs up her arms. She looked at her hands for a moment with a slight grimace. Her beautiful hands did not look like those that could belong to even the most refined parlor maid. There was no help for this difficulty, however; she could only hope that Lady Sharpe would be too absorbed by her own anxieties to notice her white hands. She smoothed back her bright hair, damping it to take some of the waviness out; her cap and apron were quickly put on, and she stood before her long glass and courtesied to herself.

"Upon my word, Cecilia, you make an admirable and even a pretty parlor maid. Now then, how ought I to show the grand lady in? I think I can guess. Let me see—ought there not to be a slate in the hall to take down orders? I am

almost sure of it, but perhaps as we have only *just* arrived, Lady Sharpe will overlook the slate this morning."

Cecilia now ran down to the dining room. Her husband was busy in his consulting room. Henny-Penny and Nance were out, Sally would not dream of leaving her kitchen, uncalled for. Cecilia hoped that Lady Sharpe would come and go without anyone finding out the metamorphosis she had undergone.

She waited in the dining room for the greater part of an hour. Then her labors were rewarded, for a landau, drawn by a pair of grays, stopped at Dr. Digby's door, and a footman in livery ran up the steps and sounded a peal through the partly empty house. Cecilia felt her color coming and going.

"Now then," she said to herself; "oh, the plunge is nothing after the first moment; it is only the first step that costs so much."

She flung the hall door open, and stood there, erect, pale, and calm. The footman made the necessary inquiries, and Lady Sharpe, a middle-aged woman of ample proportions, handsomely dressed, entered the house. She was followed by a slim and beautiful girl of about fifteen. The girl's face was radiant. A soft rose color mantled her cheeks, the whiteness of her brow and of all the rest of her face resembled milk.

Cecilia ushered the two into the dining room, closed the door softly behind them, and then went to tell her husband. She knocked at his door, but did not go in.

"Laurence, Lady Sharpe has called, and wishes to see you. Shall I ask her to come to your consulting room?"

"Yes, please," he called back, and Cecilia flew away.

"Will you come this way, madam?" she said. She tripped on before her husband's patients down the long passage, and, throwing open Digby's door, stood in the shadow herself.

He came forward to greet his visitors, and Cecilia gave a sigh of relief, for she was able, confidently, to affirm that his eyes had never for a moment rested on her. She returned to her post of observation in the dining room, and waited the issue of events. Ten, twelve, fifteen minutes went by, the consulting-room bell was heard to ring, and Cecilia ran to answer it.

"Whatever Laurence may feel, he won't betray me before Lady Sharpe," she said to herself. The consulting-room door was open, and Digby was standing there.

"Will you take this young lady to the dining room," he said. Then his eye fell on Cecilia. He started violently, and a queer look convulsed his face. Cecilia felt herself shaking from head to foot. She turned, led the way, and the beautiful, frail girl followed her.

Digby pressed his hand to his heart. The change on his face was so marked that Lady Sharpe, an astute woman, noticed it.

"Forgive me, Dr. Digby," she said, "you are ill."

"No," he replied, "but something suddenly startled me—it was of a domestic nature. I am sorry my face betrayed the emotion which my patients ought not to be worried with. Will you come and sit in this chair, Lady Sharpe?"

The doctor's self-possession quickly returned to him. Something else, however, oppressed him, and the sadness lying deep at his heart was reflected, in spite of himself, in his words.

"I want your truthful opinion," Lady Sharpe said. "You have made a careful examination of my daughter's lungs. Is it true that her left lung is slightly affected?"

"I am sorry to say that it is true," replied Digby; "the mischief is not very great at present, but she has unquestionably tubercular disease of the left lung."

Lady Sharpe drew up her veil. She had a fan in her hand; she opened it and slightly fanned her heated face.

"You will forgive me," she said. "Dorothy is the last child I have left. Once I was the mother of four beautiful children, but three of them died almost in their infancy. Dorothy has lived to grow up; I had earnestly hoped that she would be spared to me."

Digby said nothing, but the trouble in his heart filled his eyes. He looked at Lady Sharpe, and then away from her.

"What did your three children die of?" he said, after a very long pause.

"The eldest had a long illness, spinal disease followed by terrible abscesses; she gradually wasted away; the two younger ones were delicate from birth."

"Oh, it all springs from the same root," replied Digby. "Has your daughter been strong up to the present?"

"Yes, she has always from her birth been a radiant sort of creature. Brilliant is the best word by which to describe her. From her earliest days she never did anything in the common

way—she was always original; intensely lovely, gay, and full of spirits. I never remember her complaining of ache or pain. She seemed the essence of health, both in mind and body; only just a little bit too original, and now and then a shade too lovely. Last winter she had a cough which came from a cold. We took fright at once, and went to Mentone. She got quite well there, and we came back. During the last month I noticed that she now and then pressed her hand to her side, coughed a very little at night, and seemed tired for no adequate reason. Dr. [Phillips is an old friend of our family. He came to see me, and I spoke to him about Dorothy. He said that if any man could cure her, you could. He did not exactly say it in words, but he gave me distinctly to understand, Dr. Digby, that it was in your power to treat con——” Lady Sharpe cleared her throat—the next word came out with an effort—“consumption, that awful and terrible foe, in a new way. In short, he set my heart beating, for he gave me to hope, to hope *strongly*, that you had discovered an antidote for this fearful foe. Is it true? Can you cure Dorothy?”

“You give me great pain,” said Digby, in a low voice. “Sitting here in this room, I could, if I pleased send you home buoyed up with false hopes. I should be a very unfaithful physician if I did so. Phillips had no right to hint to you about a possible cure.”

“Is there none? Is it a mistake?” Lady Sharpe clasped her white hands, and the look on her eager face was piteous.

“It is an absolute mistake,” replied Digby solemnly. “I have discovered no cure for consumption. I would give my life—yes, my life—to find it; but this supreme knowledge, this greatest gift that could be put into the hands of any doctor, has not yet been vouchsafed to me.”

“Then you are searching for it?”

“That is true; but the wisdom to discover, and then to perfect the discovery, is not mine at present.”

“I was deceived,” said Lady Sharpe. “I spent the night full of hope. All the way here I kept saying to myself, ‘Dorothy will be spared, that cough will cease, she will grow strong, that ethereal loveliness, which tortures me through its very beauty, will disappear from her face.’”

“Never,” said Digby, rising. “Your daughter will never be like other girls. You are a wealthy woman, and it is possible for you to take steps which may for a very long time

arrest the disease. Your daughter must not spend a winter in England."

"No, no, but Mentone did not cure her. We were quite sure that taking her there at such an early stage would work wonders. Do you advise me to take her to Mentone again this winter, Dr. Digby?"

"I do not think so—she is too excitable. The air of the Mediterranean tends to increase that kind of unrest from which Miss Sharpe suffers. I should prefer the cold and dry air of the Engadine for her. I must ask you, however, Lady Sharpe, to consult your own family physician. You have come to me under a mistake, imagining that I could give you what, alas! is not in my power to bestow. It would be wisest for you to speak to your own doctor."

"If you prefer it," said Lady Sharpe. She rose; there was a faint stiffness in her manner.

"Dr. Phillips certainly gave me a false impression," she remarked.

"I will speak to Phillips," said Digby. "This kind of thing must not occur again. No, Lady Sharpe, I cannot possibly accept a fee. You came to me under a false impression."

"You have been very honest with me, Dr. Digby, and I thank you. You are not the magician I fondly hoped you were, but you are a very good man. Please let me acknowledge your services in the usual way."

Digby bowed, but the two guineas which Lady Sharpe slipped into his hand seemed to burn it. He followed her to the door, and saw her and her daughter out himself.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DOCTOR'S CARRIAGE.

ON that same evening Digby rang the bell of No. 47. Lights were shining in the drawing-room windows, and gay streams of brightness shone out from the polished fanlight and fell across the street. Sounds of music were heard issuing from the drawing room, and Digby guessed that the Phillipses were entertaining friends. This fact, however, did not deter him from his purpose.

"Is Dr. Phillips at home?" he asked of the irreproachable footman who opened the door.

Digby still wore his tweed suit, and a soft hat of thoroughly unprofessional aspect partly concealed his features. The man did not know him, and spoke in a tone of pardonable resentment.

"Dr. Phillips is at home," he said, "but he is particularly engaged just now. We have company upstairs this evening. If you are a patient, my master sees them from ten to one every morning."

"Say to your master that Dr. Digby wishes to have a word or two with him. Say that I won't keep him more than a moment or two," replied Digby.

The man, mortified at the mistake he had made, was now profuse in his apologies. He ushered Digby into Phillips's consulting room, a beautifully furnished apartment, with folding doors leading into an inner sanctum, and with all the arrangements which a doctor of the highest qualifications would require for interviewing his patients. The man closed the door softly behind him, and Digby threw his hat on the table. A moment later Phillips, in evening dress, came in.

"Don't apologize, my dear fellow," he began. "I am delighted to see you. The Lancasters are upstairs and two or three other friends of Helen's. We meant to ask you and your wife to join us, but Helen was quite alarmed at Mrs. Digby's pale face this morning, and proposed instead that you should come in quietly and dine with us to-morrow evening."

"Thanks," said Digby, in a brief voice. "I shan't keep you a moment now, Phillips. I have just come to say that you must never do it again."

"Do what?" asked Phillips, raising his brows. "Sit down, Digby, join me in a pipe. I can quite well spare half an hour from the folk in the drawing room."

"I can't stay, Phillips. I am on my way to Coxmoor Street. I have promised for the present to help Ray, the man who has bought my practice, with some of his more complicated cases. You know to what I allude; you must promise me that it will never occur again."

"You must explain yourself more fully," said Phillips, a slight tinge of stiffness coming into his voice. "What am I never to do again?"

"You must never again tell people that I possess a cure for consumption. Lady Sharpe came to me to-day with a false impression of my powers. She attributed almost divine at-

tributes to me. I am a most human and faulty and, in many cases, unlearned man. Of course, I undeceived her, but the process was painful, and I don't choose to have it repeated."

Phillips walked across the room, raised his hand to the gaselier, and turned a blaze of gas full on. The light fell on Digby's figure: it lit up all the lines of his somewhat hollow face, and revealed marks of care round his mouth and eyes.

"Is it true, then," said Phillips slowly, "that you have not discovered a cure for consumption?"

"I have not discovered a cure. Do you suppose for an instant that if I had I should keep it to myself? May I ask, Phillips, how, when, and where such a rumor reached you?"

"It is impossible," said Phillips, rubbing his hands slowly together, "to trace rumor to her source. The fact that you were scientific, especially scientific, was whispered at St. Christopher's. Then someone spoke of you in connection with the germ theory. When Eden Browne died, some of my friends said to me, 'There is only one man who can step into his shoes—that man is Laurence Digby.' It is certainly understood by more than one in our profession that you hold in your hands the threads of a valuable discovery: more than that I cannot say. It remains with you to win fame by it. Eden Browne had some notions, but he died before perfecting them. He died in your house. It is for you now to step into his shoes. They are empty and waiting for you to fill."

"And do you think," said Digby, his eyes blazing, "that I would make use of such a discovery, suppose I possessed it, for mere fame? Faugh! Phillips, I will be frank with you: your sentiments disgust me." With two or three strides Digby walked to the other end of the room, then he turned and faced his host.

"I have not discovered a cure for consumption," he said. "If you urged me to come to Hartrick Street imagining that I had in me the materials of a great specialist, you were under a huge mistake. God knows I have done wrong to come. I have taken a false step—I am out of place here."

Phillips had turned very white during part of Digby's speech, but he had a great deal of self-control, and he quickly assumed his usual manner. "You are excited, Digby," he said. "You have spoken to me just now as—as an old friend ought scarcely to speak, but we will let bygones be bygones."

"Whoever said that we were friends?" retorted Digby. "Your wife and mine are friends; we are acquaintances,

good companions when we meet—but friends! Phillips, if I am anything I am an honest man; nothing will ever induce me to be a humbug. Own to me frankly, did you like me when we were at St. Christopher's?—do you like me now?"

A smile played for a moment round Phillips's mouth, then he said slowly:

"You are the essence of candor. I will retort in a like spirit. While at St. Christopher's I hated you, Digby."

"Thank you," replied Digby; "an honest and true word, such as you have now spoken, covers a multitude of sins."

"But," continued Phillips, speaking with apparent impulse, "it remains with you whether I am to continue to hate you. I will say something else: I have a respect for you. There is no man in the whole medical profession whom I more thoroughly respect. My wife has a regard for your wife. We are next-door neighbors. What is to prevent our being friends?"

"Nothing," said Digby, "nothing, only our ways are different. We must each go our own way—I mine, you yours. You must not again send me patients under false pretenses, Phillips."

"No," replied Phillips, "I will say nothing more about your cure for consumption. It is your pleasure not to confide in me. But I frankly tell you that I believe you have got the germs of a great discovery in your keeping, and I tell you as frankly that I think you are doing wrong, I think you are acting cruelly to the suffering world, to conceal that knowledge; but that is an affair to settle between your conscience and yourself. As to patients coming to see you, you cannot prevent me now and then speaking of you as my kind, honest, *eccentric* friend. There are women, many women, who would travel far to visit an eccentric doctor."

"You had better say nothing about me," began Digby, but Phillips interrupted him.

"No, you are wrong there," he said, "I am likely to have a large practice. There are many cases that I cannot possibly treat—cases that you can most honestly benefit. Digby, I will own one bitter truth to you: I wish, yes I wish that I was half as clever a physician as you are."

"You can study," said Digby. "In matters of research I will give you all the aid in my power."

"Thank you, thank you; I can keep up a splendid practice without any extra study. I have not sown seed to any great

extent, and yet it lies in my power to reap a very fine harvest. You, Digby, have sown seed and watered it with the tears of toil, of wakeful nights, and anxious hours. Do you not want that seed to bear fruit?"

"It will bear the best fruit when the Almighty wills it," replied Digby, with reverence.

"Pshaw," responded the other man. "The Almighty clearly intends us to use the means put in our way. It so happens that I am the man to bring patients to your door, and I think you will behave in a very brutal manner to your pretty wife and to your child if you allow them to starve because of some farfetched, quixotic idea that you would rather not be spoken of to people as a clever and painstaking physician."

"True," said Digby, "true." He stood silent for some little time; Phillips looked toward the door; he could get nothing further out of Digby for the present, and he was impatient to return to his guests.

Digby, lost in his anxious thoughts, had forgotten all about Phillips's visitors.

"You will let me do what I can for you," said Phillips, "and now pardon me; if you will not join us upstairs—and I do not expect you would care to do this—I fear I must return to Helen and her guests."

Digby snatched up his hat. "Forgive me," he said, "for being thoughtless. Well, Phillips, you must do as you think right, but remember my terms. No whisper about a cure for consumption or anything else. If you like to say that a poor, eccentric, half mad doctor has come to forty-eight, in the hopes of securing patients, you are welcome to do so for the sake of my wife and child. I have no right to forbid that. Only speak of me as I am, Phillips, as a man who thinks more of truth than fame, and before God, I can also say, who loves honor before money. Now, good-night, good-night."

Phillips held out his hand. Digby grasped it with a force which hurt the younger and slighter man, and rushed out of the house.

Phillips stood for a moment or two alone in his consulting room. He turned down the gas, pushed a chair which Digby had moved out of its place into its original position, looked round once more to remove all traces of disorder, and then went slowly up to the drawing room.

A goodly company were assembled there. Not only the

Lancasters, but some friends of Phillips's and one or two acquaintances who could not yet be classed in the category of friends.

"What kept you, James?" asked his wife. She skimmed lightly across the room, and laid her dimpled hand for a moment on his arm.

"Only our mad doctor next door," he replied, in a playful tone.

"Oh," asked Helena, "is anything wrong with Cecil?"

"Nothing, nothing. My dear, we must introduce Digby to some of our friends. That man is the most appallingly clever, most pathetically truthful, creature I have ever come across."

"Whom do you mean, Dr. Phillips?" asked Mrs. Barchester, a very rich woman, who had lately called Phillips in as her family physician.

"I was speaking of Digby," he replied, "a man who has just taken forty-eight, poor Eden Browne's house."

"What?" retorted Mrs. Barchester, "the house of the consumption specialist, who went mad, they say, before he died?"

"They say a great many things that are not true," replied Phillips. "Well, Digby has always made consumption his study."

"Has he bought a practice here?" asked Mrs. Barchester.

"He has not," replied Phillips, "because he doesn't need to. He is certain to have more patients than he can well attend to before long. There is no man in the profession whom I would rather consult."

"He has a very good friend in you," replied Mrs. Barchester.

"You mistake me," said Phillips; "we are not, even in the ordinary sense of the word, friends. At St. Christopher's, where we both studied, we were diametrically opposed in our views, but I respect Digby as I respect few other men."

Then he laughed, and bent his handsome head slightly nearer to the good lady's.

"Shall I whisper a secret to you?" he said. "Please don't breathe a word of it to a soul. I think Digby so clever that I am absolutely jealous of him. Of course, as to manners he is a bear. He will probably receive his patients in an old shooting coat, but, whatever else they get from him, they will certainly get the truth; for accurate diagnosis and plain speaking recommend me to Digby."

Phillips moved away to speak to another guest, and Mrs. Barchester, having promised secrecy, revealed everything straight away to the neighbor who sat on the sofa by her side.

Digby received the beginning of his reputation at that small dinner party. An eccentric, bearish, truthful doctor, of rare ability, had come to live in poor Eden Browne's house. Would he not be just the man for Lady Newton, with her fads and her hysterics, to consult? Would he not be the right person for Sir Henry Spence to get a candid opinion from? etc., etc., etc.

The ball which was to bring reputation and all the other things in its train to Digby's feet was set rolling that night. What was Phillips's motive for so substantially helping a man who was not even his friend?

Digby went back to his wife, and said a few words to her.

"My darling," he said, "you must never do what you did this morning again. I promised to say nothing more to you of my feelings against coming to this house when the die was cast. I shall keep that promise to the end, Cecilia; but when I saw you in your servant's cap and apron to-day you nearly broke my heart."

Tears sprang to Cecilia's eyes. "Did you not read my motive?" she said. "It was love for you, earnest, passionate desire that you should succeed."

"Let me look you full in the face," retorted Digby. "You call what you did to-day love for me. Was it in reality love for a man who puts truth before all things in this world? My dear wife, my dearest friend, was it not rather love of ambition, love of riches? O Cecilia, God help me! and I care for none of these things."

Cecilia began to cry.

"Sometimes you frighten me," she sobbed. "I cannot reach up to your heights at all. I cannot understand you. Don't you know that very good people can have a due regard to being rich? Don't you know that very good people can wish for a great reputation?"

"Doubtless. But my tastes do not happen to lie in that direction. Now, my darling, dry your eyes; we will not discuss the question any further, only hear my ultimatum. You are never to be parlor-maid in 48 Hartrick Street again."

"No, no, I never will."

"And James Phillips is not to infect you with his ideas of life."

"No," she said, suddenly taking up her husband's big hand and kissing it, "not while I have you for my teacher."

"My dear," continued Digby, "Phillips and I are as the poles asunder. I do not want to set myself up as a better man than Phillips, and yet I won't be untrue; I believe, before God, that I am a man with a deeper sense of honor. Now, to revert to the question of domestic servants. The little humble *ménage* at Coxmoor Street will not suffice for 48 Hartrick Street."

"Helen was here this morning," retorted Cecilia, "and she suggested that we should have a man in every morning for three or four hours, who would open the door for your patients."

"My dear, you forget that I have no patients."

"But they will come. I feel positively assured of that."

"When they come in sufficient numbers we will think of a manservant," said Digby. "At present I would rather not have one in the house, but to-morrow you must go to a really good registry office and engage a parlor maid who will open the door and be able to record faithfully all messages on a slate. At first she will be taken up replying to my old Coxmoor connection, for I can well assure you that some of them will follow me here; in any case, they will be good practice for her when those rich people whom you have set your heart on begin to arrive, my darling."

Cecilia's next remark was made with a queer beating at her heart.

"About your carriage?" she whispered.

"You know I don't intend to set up a carriage."

"But, Laurence, if you would just listen to reason. Having taken this great step, must everything prove a failure because you will not drive to see your patients?"

"My dear, even if I could afford to keep a carriage, I should miss my walk—I should get out of health. My poor folks would be quite uncomfortable if they saw me driving up to their doors in a brougham. Cecilia, my love, what is the matter?"

Cecilia had suddenly burst into an agony of tears.

"I am sorry we came here," she said. "It was a bold experiment, but it might have succeeded if you would only take the right steps; but you fail at the critical juncture. You don't care for money—I do. I don't want it because I long for soft living and beautiful dresses, and all those lux-

uries which people generally associate with wealth, but I do want it because I believe in you, and know that if you are a rich and great physician you can help thousands of people who will never know anything about you as long as you live in retirement. I do want it also because of little Nance, for little Nance must have no rough breath to blow on her. O Laurence, look me in the face and tell me if our-child can live under the breath of adversity?"

"We can never tell," replied Digby, "what may or may not be best for a human life, but, as far as lies in my power, I am bound to tell you the truth. Nance has a frail life, an ill wind might quickly crush it. There is not the least doubt in the world that the life which the wealthy lead would be the best life for our little girl."

"Then," said Cecilia eagerly, crimson spots on each of her cheeks, "you will take steps to secure that life—you will be guided by me, yes—by me! I have brought you here; I have taken the responsibility. Having done the great thing, you must not fail with regard to the little."

"All this means," interrupted Digby, "that I am to drive about, a miserable man, in a close carriage, for so many hours every day—no good to myself or anyone else."

"Yes, yes, good to me—the best possible good to me."

Digby pushed his wife's hair from her forehead.

"How about the means to pay for the carriage?" he asked. "You have a strange power of twisting me round your little finger, but I swear before heaven that you shall not touch the money put away for the rent."

"No," said Cecilia, "I can manage without that. Leave ways and means to me, Laurence. You left the furnishing of the house to me, and asked no questions. I do not want to buy a carriage now, but I do want to hire one. Let me hire a brougham say—say for three months. If at the end of that time you do not need it, I will promise you faithfully to say no word of complaining, to utter no grumble of any sort, but with my own lips to counsel you to put it down. Grant me this one more boon. Let me hire a brougham for you for three months."

And Digby, being in many particulars a weak man, bent and kissed his wife, and said:

"Do as you please."

CHAPTER IX.

TURN, FORTUNE, TURN THY WHEEL.

ABOUT a week after Lady Sharpe had come to see Digby, he received a letter from her.

"Please come and see me between two and three this afternoon," she wrote.

Cecilia felt almost undue elation at this brief epistle, but Digby took it quietly.

"How glad I am that you have got that nice brougham," said the wife, "and how delightful to see you in that long, professional black coat. Laurence, you really look delightful! To see you enter a room would give confidence to any sick person."

Digby folded up his letter, and slipped it into his pocket.

"I am glad I please you," he said. "Now, you must please me. Put on your bonnet and drive with me to Lady Sharpe's. You can sit in the brougham while I pay my visit, and to keep you company little Nance shall come and sit on your knee and talk to you."

Cecilia laughed, and ran off gaily to get ready.

She was a really beautiful young woman at this time, and, in a black silk dress and daintily made soft gray bonnet, looked as sweet and charming a wife as man could desire.

Nance was also highly elated at the thought of a drive with her father and mother, and the little brougham was full of merry sounds and gay baby laughter as it rolled away to Cadogan Square.

Digby got out, and remained for nearly an hour with Lady Sharpe. She told him frankly what she required.

"I was full of hope the other day when I paid you a visit," she said. "Your words gave me keen and bitter disappointment. The disappointment is now a thing of the past. I am much as I was before. Dr. Digby, my husband and I have more money than we know what to do with, but money without Dorothy is like meat without salt. You are a very honest, a very good, and, I am certain, a very clever physician. Take Dorothy's little frail life into your hands, and keep her with us as long as possible."

"Dear madam," replied Digby, "the precious little life is in higher hands than mine."

"Yes, yes, but God puts thoughts into the heads of clever

doctors like you. Use them for Dorothy's benefit. Her father and I wish you to become her physician. Do your best for her. Take her under your care."

"I will gladly do my utmost for her. Shall I see her now?"

"In a moment or two. I have something else I want to say. You spoke of the Engadine as a good place for our child to winter in."

"I think so still," replied Digby. "One of the newest ideas with regard to consumption is that cold, dry air can effect wonderful results. Of course, I mean in cases where the patients have not suffered for a length of time; in cases like your daughters, where the mischief is comparatively small and recent. Cold, dry air in such cases excites the action of each portion of the lung, and the consequence is that the disease is often completely arrested and the patch of tubercle dried up. I hold with the idea, but, of course, the greatest number of the profession is against it. The prevailing idea is that warm, soft air acts like cream to the diseased lung and effects a partial cure. I recommend the Engadine for your daughter, Lady Sharpe, but I can scarcely ask you to take her there on my responsibility alone. Had you not better consult Dr. Dickinson, for instance. He is one of the cleverest men in the profession for cases of tubercular disease. I will gladly take Miss Sharpe to see him if you will allow me."

"No," replied Lady Sharpe, "neither her father nor I wish it. We know Dr. Dickinson's name, of course, and we could have taken Dorothy to him in the first instance, but, having consulted you, we wish you to take the matter into your own hands. We do not want a second opinion. Hundreds of people go for cure to the Riviera. They come back supposed to be cured, and their friends are full of false hopes. But the first chill, the first breath of cold air in Old England, undoes all the good that the warm climate has effected. The old mischief begins again, and the patients die. Your idea with regard to the Engadine quite fills me with hope, Dr. Digby. No, please don't crush it—let me hope while I may. Now, I have one more thing to ask. To what part of the Engadine shall we take Dorothy?"

"You must go to the high air of the Upper Engadine, where there is plenty of sunlight. St. Moritz would probably suit you."

"I am coming to the point," interrupted Lady Sharpe.

"Dr. Digby, my husband made a suggestion to me last night. He wants to know if you will accompany us when we go abroad—will you stay with us for a week or ten days, for longer if necessary, in order to help us to choose the very best place for our winter residence, in order to test the effect of the climate on our child, in order also to put her under the care of the very best physician in the place? I know," continued Lady Sharpe, "that I ask a great sacrifice at your hands. Your valuable practice, your patients—you must have many, many patients—will have to do without you for a certain time, but money is no object with us. We will compensate you for any money loss you may sustain. We will pay you any reasonable sum you like to ask, and we will also gladly pay for the services of a first-rate physician to take your place in 48 Hartrick Street while you are away. Will you consider our proposal? Will you come with us?"

"I cannot say at this moment that I will come with you," said Digby, "but I will think over the proposal with which you have honored me, and I will let you know my decision within twenty-four hours."

"What a good man you are! I see by your eyes that you will come."

"It is very probable that I may, but I cannot speak certainly yet."

"And your price—but we need not talk about money yet."

"Yes," said Digby, "we must talk about the money part, and at once. I am coming to that. My price, Lady Sharpe, for accompanying you and your husband and Miss Sharpe to the Engadine will not be ruinous. I must confess something to you—I have no patients to leave behind me. I have only just come to 48 Hartrick Street, and my patients—if ever I am to have any rich patients—have yet to find me out. The wealthy patients who make a doctor's time of immense money value do not exist at present for me, Lady Sharpe."

"Is it possible," said Lady Sharpe, opening her eyes, "is it possible that a man of your attainments, your skill, your acumen, can be unknown—that no one comes to consult you? Have you really no patients? I cannot believe you."

"In your sense of the word, I have no patients. There are many of the poor who know me well: I had a large practice among the unpaying population in a poor part of Bloomsbury. I have left them—God knows why—and come to Hartrick Street. Enough; I have stated the fact to

you. I shall not refuse a fee for accompanying you and Sir Probyn Sharpe and Miss Dorothy, but it will not be a large one. Now, can I see your daughter?"

After the medical interview was over, Dorothy Sharpe, who was feeling well and in high spirits to-day, skipped out on the balcony to see her new doctor step into his brougham.

A moment later she rushed back to her mother in a state of excitement.

"Mother, what *do* you think? There was a sweet little child in the carriage. Her head was all over those bobby little curls which are so fascinating, and I think the doctor kissed her as he was getting into the carriage, although I am not so sure about that. But, mother dear, what I wanted to say was something much more important. The little girl was sitting on a beautiful lady's knee, and the lady—— Mother, she opened the door for us the day we called in Hartrick Street."

"That accounts for it," said Lady Sharpe.

"Accounts for what, mother?"

"Nothing, dear, nothing. Don't sit in a draught, Dorothy, my love. Poor man, how pale he got! It was then he saw her. I thought something had made him suddenly ill. Dorothy, the lives of other people are often full of sorrow. I should not be surprised if the Digbys were very poor."

"Oh, mother, scarcely! They live in Hartrick Street."

"Even though they live in Hartrick Street. Dorothy, sweet, we will be very good to them."

"Yes, mother. Yes, yes. I love Dr. Digby already. If he were to say to me, 'Dorothy, you have got to die,' I think the look in his eyes would take fear from my heart. I should like him to hold my hand when I am slipping out of the world. What is the matter, mother?"

"He is more likely to say, 'Dorothy, you have got to live,' " said Lady Sharpe, rising from her chair. "Do you know, my love, that we have asked him to come with us to the Engadine?"

"How lovely! Could you not ask the pretty wife and the sweet child to come, too?"

"I will if you wish it. Yes, Dorothy, I noticed her white hands. Poor girl, poor girl! But no wonder her husband turned pale."

Book III.—Dr. Digby.

CHAPTER I.

MOTIVES.

"I AM quite ready now, mother. The story is perfect. You must listen to me. Put down your work and fix your eyes on my face, and then I will begin."

The speaker was a slim little girl about nine years of age. Her name was Nance Digby, and her big, rather hungry, rather sad, gray eyes were fixed with an eager concentration on her mother's countenance.

"Mother, mother, you must listen. Put down your work, and let me tell you my beautiful story."

"Nance, darling, father says that it isn't good for you to excite your little brain by telling so many stories."

"Oh, mother dear!" The child laughed merrily. "That sounds as if father thought I were not speaking the truth. I cannot help making up stories, and I cannot help telling them to some one. Henny-Penny doesn't understand them, but you do—I see by your eyes that you do. Mother, mother," she added, her expressive face changing, "I love to tell my stories to you, for I know that you agree with me about them."

"What do you mean, Nance?"

"You see the truth under the words. It seems to me that there are no things in all the world so true as some of my stories. They are more beautiful than anything else to me; they comfort my heart more than anything else."

"Come and put your arms round my neck," said Cecilia.

She folded the thin little figure in a passionate embrace, printed a kiss on the big brow, and pushed back the child's hair from her forehead.

"Now, darling mother, you must listen. I have got a lovely name for my story to-night. I have called it 'Inside

and Outside the World.' My head is full of it—it is quite a lovely story. Now, are you ready? Shall I begin?"

"What is that I hear?" asked another voice. The door of the beautifully furnished drawing-room was opened, and Digby, quite an elderly looking man now, strode across the room.

Nance sprang at once from her mother's side and clasped her arms affectionately round his legs.

"Daddy, you don't really think it is wrong of me to tell stories to mother?"

Digby sat down by the open window, and Nance curled herself up in a contented fashion into his arms.

"I am awfully cozy when I sit like this," she said. "Now may I begin my story? Mother, are you going to listen? Father, just say that I may tell my beautiful story to mother."

Digby took out his watch.

"You may tell your mother all the little romance that is in your heart for exactly ten minutes, Nancy," he said. "No more time will be allowed. After the ten minutes are up, you are to go straight to bed and forget the story."

"Yes, I will try and forget it; it isn't easy, though. It is very hard indeed to forget the lovely things that come into my head. My head gets so full of them sometimes that I scarcely know what to do, but I will try my very best if I may talk fast and let out a lot of thoughts for ten minutes. First, though, I want to ask a question. Are you going out this evening, dad?"

"I cannot possibly say. I have no present intention of going out to-night, but a doctor's time is not his own."

"Dr. Phillips never goes out in the evening," said Nance, "and he says——"

"Hush, my love," replied Digby, "you have got to attend to the sayings and doings of your own doctor, who lives at No. 48. You have no occasion to trouble your wise little head about what any other doctor does."

"I should think not," said Nance. "Now, shall I begin my story. Mother, are you listening?"

"Yes, sweet," replied Cecilia. She gave the child a passionate glance of adoration, then dropped her eyes to hide some tears which were springing into them.

Nance began her tale. It was wild, absolutely improbable, but also absolutely original. There were fairies in it, and

princes, and little girls with brave hearts. The children in the story had battles to fight, had fears to slay, had enemies to encounter. They did the right thing without swerving, and they always came off victorious in the battle.

As the little narrator poured out her eager, quick, spirited words her cheeks flushed and her lovely eyes gleamed with a spiritual light as if she was looking far ahead and really living in the queer but exquisite medley her imagination had conjured up.

"Hush, Nance," said Digby at last. "Your ten minutes have expired, so you must say good-night, and go to bed."

"Daddy, if you are not going out, will you come upstairs in half an hour and hear me say my prayers?"

"Yes, my dearest, yes."

"I will be sure to pray for you, you darlingest dad." She squeezed her arm round his neck, and crushed a fierce kiss on his cheek. "I will pray for you, too, mother, and you will come up to see me, won't you?"

Mrs. Digby nodded, kissed the child two or three times, and let her go.

When the door closed behind the little girl, Cecilia turned at once to her husband.

"I thought you did not wish Nance to be encouraged in her habit of telling stories," she said.

"It is impossible to suppress her altogether," said Digby. "The child will write lovely stories to guide and help people when she is older—that is, if she lives."

"Laurence!" His wife's voice was passionate with pain.

Digby looked at her sorrowfully. "The little one carries a frail and uncertain life in her breast," he said in a low voice. "Her very genius is but a part of that malady which she was born to inherit. There, Cecilia, don't cry. Nance has been well up to the present. With great care she may continue to enjoy fair health for many years. I have thought much of her case, and I see more and more every day that it would be wrong to turn her mind from its natural bent. Her vivid imagination cannot be altogether repressed; it must be strengthened and guided by judicious study, and by developing her brain in other directions. She has a love for natural history. That love must be fostered. A great deal must be done both to brace her mind and body, but to suppress her imagination altogether would do her a serious mischief. I am

sometimes inclined to think that a very good school would be the best place for her."

"No," replied Cecilia, "that is a cruel thought. I will never consent to part with her."

"Your influence is not the best for her, Cecilia. You are too sensitive yourself, you make too much of her trivial ailments; these ought to be passed over unnoticed. It is impossible for you to help this. You have a good deal of morbidness in your nature; the child inherits that from you—your very love for her partakes of this morbid quality."

Mrs. Digby's face changed color; she moved restlessly in her chair, then leaving her seat by the open window, she stepped on to the balcony and began to arrange some flowers that filled it. Digby took up an evening paper and read. After a little he looked at his watch, remembered his promise to Nance, and went upstairs to fulfill it.

The little girl's room was the prettiest in the house. It contained pictures, toys, and childish books. It was all gay, all fresh. There seemed no want in the lovely room, and Nance, now sitting up in her white bed waiting for her father, made an exquisite center to the pretty picture.

The child's little face was scarcely in itself beautiful. The mouth was pathetic and old in its expression, the cheeks were slightly hollow, the complexion wanting in color, but the upper part of the face, the brows, the white forehead, the eyes, out of which a lovely eager soul seemed ever to look, made that little countenance one hard to be forgotten even by those who only saw her once or twice—made it one to be passionately loved by those who knew her well.

Digby came up now and kissed the child.

"Daddy, I have waited to say my prayers. Stoop down and let me put my arms round your neck and whisper them against your ear."

Digby knelt down by the bed, and Nance knelt upon it and laid her soft cheek against the doctor's. She prayed, whispering her words so low that they scarcely reached his ear.

"Now, my darling," said Digby, "lie down, shut your eyes, and go to sleep."

"Father, dear," said Nance, "I do take such a long, long time going to sleep. I say my texts over and over and over, then I say my prayers again. Sometimes I am praying for you and mother for such an age—it comforts me to pray a lot

when I am lying awake and longing for Henny-Penny to come to bed. Why doesn't God let me go to sleep just at once when I shut my eyes like other little girls, Daddy?"

"Because you think too much, Nance. Now listen, my dearest, I am going to say something which you must not misunderstand. God loves to listen to your little prayers, and most assuredly when you call He will answer, while you speak He will hear, but, darling, He doesn't want you to say the same prayers over and over again. You have prayed for mother and for me and for all the people you love already to-night. God knows what you wish about them, so now, my dear, let the matter drop. You have told your wants to God: be assured that He will do everything that is best for you. Prayer, Nance, does not mean a lot of words said over and over again. 'Prayer is the soul's sincere desire.' Do you understand me, Nancy?"

"I think so, darling dad."

"Well, my love, you know what your sincere desire is? Now, good-night—shut your eyes—go to sleep."

Digby passed his hand two or three times over the child's hot forehead, then he drew down the blinds, kissed little Nance, and shut the door softly behind him.

"That child is twenty times too precocious," he murmured to himself as he ran downstairs. "Oh, poor Cecil and poor Nance, if I could only discover some radical means of curing that tendency which will surely make life too heavy a burden to you both!"

Seven years in Hartrick Street had brought many changes in their course. The bold experiment which Cecilia had made was successful. Little by little Digby gained patients, gained popularity, gained a practice sufficient to bring him in a really large income. The brougham which came every day to his door was no longer a hired one. Money anxieties had fled from the household. Cecilia managed the purse, and Digby ceased to speak of possible debts and possible money cares.

Without intending it, he had become a specialist in his profession. In all cases of tubercular disease no man was more consulted, and no man's opinion was of greater value than Laurence Digby's. His treatment of Dorothy Sharpe had prolonged her life without curing her lungs—she would be delicate all her days, but under Digby's judicious management the disease was arrested, and, unless something occurred

to start it into activity, she might live even to see old age. Lady Sharpe and Dorothy were some of the doctor's warmest friends. They spoke of him far and near, and to them as much as to Phillips he owed the patients who came day after day to this house in search of cure.

As riches poured in, Cecilia showed herself capable of managing them to the best advantage.

"Laurence," she said to her husband, when the tide of prosperity was so plainly on the flow that doubts and fears might now be abandoned, "you have your patients—you have all the cares of your profession to worry and absorb your mind. Let me keep the purse strings. Hand the money over to me as you earn it."

"I will gladly do so," said Digby. "I am the worst money manager in the world."

From that moment Cecilia received the guineas which were placed in Digby's hand by grateful patients. She made, as she thought, the best use of this little harvest, and Digby banished the cares of money from his mind.

As the years went on, however, the intimacy between Digby and Phillips did not increase. On the contrary, the aversion which each man felt for the other manifested itself in small actions, in slight coldnesses, in the thousand and one ways in which a man can show his brother that, though they may touch hands outwardly, there is a wide gulf between their hearts.

Cecilia and Helena met nearly every day, but Phillips and Digby saw little of each other for weeks at a time.

Phillips had also won success in his profession. He had a particularly gracious manner, a kind and sympathetic glance, a voice with a certain pathetic ring in it which women found especially captivating, and a perfect genius for concealing unpleasant truths from his patients.

If Digby was a little too brusque in telling the naked truth, Phillips, on the other hand, gilded the bitter pill so effectually that real danger, even when it existed, was quite unsuspected. He was a man with a certain smart and showy cleverness, and as years went by, and more and more patients came to him, and he visited a wider and wider circle of sick people, he gained an invaluable amount of experience, which he was quite sharp enough to use to the best possible advantage. He became a great favorite with ladies, and those in especial who suffered from nervous ailments thought his

diagnosis delightful. He assured the sufferers that their complaints were real, not imaginary, and, cleverly watching their faces while he spoke, he invariably ordered the prescription on which their hearts were set. Lady Mary Fortescue must winter at Nice; Mrs Henderson must go into society as much as she pleased; Miss Honor Douglas must give up her French and German, and be presented a year younger than her mother had the least intention of allowing her to come out.

Whatever the prescription, the opinions which followed it were always the same.

"Dear Dr. Phillips! how delightful he is, how sympathizing, how understanding! And above all things, how *true!*"

For one of the great secrets of Phillips's power was his ability to make a falsehood look like a truth, and the chief reason why he detested Digby was his own perception of the other man's real knowledge of his character.

Phillips was successful, but he was not contented. He had an affectionate and pretty wife, he had more money than he knew what to do with, he had a beautiful home and heaps of friends.

Still, as the years went on, the discontent in his heart grew fiercer and fiercer.

He envied Digby. There were two things Digby had that he wanted. One was a child (Phillips had no children), the other was the secret that Digby possessed and made no use of.

The knowledge of that secret sank every day, every month, every year, with a deeper weight of displeasure and annoyance into Phillips's heart.

He would have given half his fortune to possess it. To be the man to proclaim such a secret to the world would be fame indeed.

His ears tingled, his heart beat, he felt a sense of irritation from head to foot, as night after night he sat in his consulting room, with his medical books spread around him, and thought of the man at the other side of the wall who was probably also searching for knowledge, and yet possessed and kept to himself the threads of a gift which might spread sunshine through the entire world.

Phillips called Digby many hard names under his breath. He accused him of cowardice, indifference, of even brutality in allowing his patients to suffer, while he held the sovereign remedy which alone would restore them to health.

It was many years now since Phillips had obtained a clew to Digby's discovery.

He had found it out through an accident which a more honorable man would not have made use of.

Phillips, while a student at St. Christopher's, had, on a certain occasion, become the possessor of Digby's pocket-book.

In going the rounds of one of the wards Digby had dropped it without being aware of the fact. Phillips picked it up, intending to return it to him, but Digby was at the moment engaged in earnest consultation with one of the visiting physicians.

Phillips slipped the book into his own pocket, and forgot that he had it.

That night he had a headache, and went early to his room. In taking off his coat, the pocketbook fell on the floor. He picked it up, drew a candle toward him, sat down in his shirt sleeves, and began deliberately to examine the contents.

The pocketbook was full of notes, some in shorthand, of which Phillips could make nothing, but others clearly written out in Digby's firm and very legible hand.

Phillips expected to find treasures of a different kind in the pocketbook. He glanced over the medical notes with languid interest, and was about to replace them in their receptacle when the recurrence of a certain word repeated many times attracted his attention.

The word was "tubercular." Phillips had no special interest in the class of disease this word referred to. He came himself of a very healthy stock, but it so happened that he was attending a course of lectures on this subject, and it occurred to him that Digby's clever notes might materially help him. They were all numbered, and he quickly arranged them in rotation, and began to read.

His eyes rested on the following words:

"After various attempts have succeeded in obtaining a pure lymph. Have I in my hands the remedy for this terrible scourge of tubercular disease?"

Phillips read these words two or three times. He turned the papers eagerly. Soon another extract fixed his attention.

"Injected half a dram of the attenuated lymph at 8.30 p. m. At 8.45, felt a distinct rigor, felt ill all night, could not sleep. Temperature 101° to 105°. Began to wonder, had

I produce a septicæmia in myself. In the morning, 8.30, temperature normal. Felt shaky, head full of pain."

There were various other notes, which Phillips read and re-read. It is unnecessary to say that he was quickly interested, absorbed, struck dumb with wonder. Light seemed to pour in upon him. What had he not found? What germ of a great thought—nay, what great and wonderful thought in its maturity did not lie in his hands? He turned to the first slip of paper and read it again:

"After various attempts have succeeded in obtaining a pure lymph. Have I in my hands the remedy for this terrible scourge?"

Phillips read all these slips of paper many times, then he uttered an exclamation of dismay. The notes in his hand were, after all, of the most tantalizing kind. What was the pure lymph? Where was it to be found? How was it to be perfected? The notes in themselves were nothing, this clew being wanted. Here they failed, fell short, stopped.

Phillips swore a great oath of disappointment. Then he sat with his head in his hands, thinking hard.

If only he could steal Digby's discovery from him and use it for himself! What a revenge was here for the insults Digby had heaped on him at St. Christopher's, for the slighting remarks with regard to his personal appearance which so galled him, for the scant courtesy with which his would-be clever remarks were received, for the brusquerie which crushed his immature ideas!

Phillips hated Digby with the cordial hatred of the insincere toward the sincere, of the shallow toward the deep nature, of the superficialist toward the man of profound knowledge. If he could only adapt Digby's cure and proclaim it to the world as his own, then he felt that the spite in his heart would die and he could forgive Digby.

The notes in Digby's pocketbook were, however, in themselves useless. A cleverer man than Phillips could have made nothing of them, for the guiding thought which put each word in its rightful place was not supplied. The notes were even misleading; they seemed to Phillips to point to a finished and thoroughly established discovery, not to a great idea in its infancy.

He spent a sleepless night; the next morning he found an opportunity to restore the pocketbook to Digby's room—Digby himself had never missed it—and then made up his mind to

cultivate the friendship of his natural enemy, in order to steal his secret from him by guile.

From the moment Phillips read the notes in the pocket-book this thought became the ruling passion of his life. It was with this motive that he induced the Digbys to come to Hartrick Street; it was with this motive that he helped Digby to obtain patients, and secretly assisted Cecilia when she was short of money.

The object of his life was to get Digby into his power.

As yet, however, all Phillips's efforts had been in vain. Digby sometimes wondered how the rumors that were circulated about him got abroad. He was tired of parrying inquiries with regard to the great scientific discovery he was supposed to have made; for no hints from friend or foe could draw a word of real admission from his lips. His attitude was strictly neutral. Cecilia was the only person to whom he had ever spoken of what had once been a great, but was now, alas! an unfulfilled dream, and Cecilia was true as steel.

It occurred to Phillips that, as a last resource, he might play upon Cecilia's fears with regard to Nance, and induce her to talk to her husband on the subject of his long buried discovery. He watched for his opportunity, and on the very evening on which Digby went upstairs to hear his little girl say her prayers, he called at No. 48, and ran up to the drawing room, to find Cecilia busy with her flowers.

The "window dodge" had long ago been abandoned in Cecilia's lovely home. The large and beautiful house was now fully furnished from attic to cellar, and the exquisite taste of its mistress was apparent in all its arrangements.

Cecilia had developed into an excellent and capable housewife. Her household was well ordered, its machinery kept in motion by kindly words, by tact (it was quite a new thing for poor Cecilia to develop tact), by firmness and yet by sympathy. Beauty and peace both reigned in Digby's house, and Cecilia was the motive power that kept all in harmony.

Phillips came into the drawing room now, and seeing Mrs. Digby on the balcony, joined her there.

"Helen has sent me with a message," he said. "She wants to know if you will name a day to come on the river with us. We thought of inviting the Lawsons and the Merediths, and a few other friends. Suppose we say Saturday week. If you and Digby will join us, we will write and

order a steam launch and make the other necessary preparations."

"I will ask my husband," said Cecilia. "He is particularly busy just now. He is anxious about some of his cases."

"Does he confide his anxieties to you?"

"Of course," she answered proudly. "He never tells any of his patients' secrets, but he does talk to me when he is anxious, and I try my best to cheer him."

"A model wife," said Phillips, with a little laugh. His tone was melodious and sweet, but there was a covert sneer in his handsome eyes, which Mrs. Digby saw and quickly resented.

She walked to the other end of the balcony, and sat down in a low deck chair. The old, almost forgotten dislike to Phillips rose up again in her heart.

His eyes followed her as she swept across the little balcony. Her perfectly proportioned figure, the proud pose of her head, the exquisite color which mantled her cheeks were none of them lost on him.

"Every inch a queen," he quoted under his breath. "By Jove," he thought, in his jealous soul, "if only little Helen could look like this woman! Why should Digby have everything? I hate the man! I'll be his undoing if I can!"

He was standing by a tall, flowering plant; he now followed Mrs. Digby and stood by her side.

"Where is Nance?" he asked.

Cecilia stretched out her hand and pulled a rose from a shrub in full flower; she held it in her hand, and absently took off one petal after the other as she replied:

"It shows what a stranger you are, Dr. Phillips, when you ask if Nance is up at this hour. If children are to be kept healthy, they must be sent to bed betimes. I trust she is in the land of dreams long ere this."

"If children are to be kept healthy," repeated Phillips. The marked tones of anxiety in his voice arrested Mrs. Digby's over-anxious heart. She ceased to pull her rose to pieces, and her eyes, pathetic and questioning, were fixed on the man who stood near her.

"Why do you speak like that?" she said. "You awake my anxieties. Nance is an only child."

"And has the cleverest doctor in the world for her father," returned James Phillips. "If ever a woman need not be anxious, it is Mrs. Digby. Nance is a lovely creature. She

reminds me of a spirit—her movements are so light, her glance so swift, her smile so radiant. She is not a common child, by any means. I should apply the word genius to her. I was only remarking to my wife last night that I never met anyone so absolutely original as your little Nance.”

As Phillips spoke he dropped into another deck chair which was standing near him. The rich tones of his voice fell on Cecilia's ear with a power which awakened all her fears. She wanted to go away, she wanted to shake off the spell which she feared; but the subject which Phillips discussed fascinated her, and she felt afraid to move.

After a very long pause she said:

“I would rather people said anything of Nance than that she had genius and beauty. Nothing in the world would give me such comfort as to hear the remark made, ‘That is a plain and commonplace child.’ ”

“Such a sentence could never be uttered,” said Phillips. “The child is uncommon to the last degree, and——”

“She is not strictly beautiful,” said Cecilia, in a tone of entreaty.

“Her features are not perfect,” replied Phillips, “but once get a glance from those eyes—— Ah! Mrs. Digby, you are to be congratulated. Anyone would be proud to be the mother of a creature like your little daughter.”

Cecilia again sat silent. The rose in her hand was plucked to pieces, the torn leaves lay on her light silk dress, her white hand trembled as it rested on her knee. At last she spoke abruptly.

“I must ask you a question. What is your candid opinion with regard to our little girl's health?”

Phillips laughed.

“Ask your husband,” he said.

“Of course, I can do that,” replied Cecilia; “but a father, and a very devoted father, may be prejudiced—may be unable to come to the exact truth. You are also a doctor, but you are an outsider. As an outsider, tell me frankly what you think of Nance. Is she strong? Is she likely to grow up a strong woman?”

Phillips glanced toward the open window. He felt half inclined to get up and shut it; his chair creaked, his answer was delayed.

“Speak to me,” said Cecilia. “I want to know the truth—the exact truth.”

"The exact truth is this," said Phillips. "Nance seems to me to be the kind of child who may die of consumption unless very great care is taken of her."

"Thank you," said Cecilia. Her face was deathly pale. She rose from her chair, and shook the rose leaves to the ground.

"Mrs. Digby," said Phillips suddenly, "you know, you must know, that the remedy lies, to a certain extent, in your own hands."

"The remedy? What do you mean? Is there anything in the wide world, is there anything beneath the earth or in the heavens above, that a mother would not do to save the life of her only child? The remedy! Good God! Dr. Phillips, you speak, who know very little of a mother's heart!"

"Forgive me, dear lady," said Phillips. "I spoke with reason. You know as well as I do that the remedy which can cure little Nance lies in your husband's hands. Get him to use it. There, I have spoken."

CHAPTER II.

TWO DOCTORS AND TWO PATIENTS.

THE picnic on the Thames was arranged to take place on the following Saturday week. The Phillipses and the Digbys were to give it between them. They were both to ask a certain number of friends, and Cecilia was now busy making a list of those acquaintances to whom she intended to send invitations.

Nance stood by her mother's side as she sat by her writing table.

"We will ask the Sharpes," said Cecilia. "They must come, whoever else refuses; and what do you think of inviting the Carrs? You are rather fond of little Arthur Carr, Nance, and we might ask Mr. and Mrs. Robertson and their children. My darling, how delighted you look! Oh, what it is to be young! For my part, I quite dread the day—such a crowd of people, and the sun will be so hot, and the water so dazzling. If we were going alone—just you and I and dad—I, too, could skip for joy: but with a crowd, and many of them total strangers, I confess to you, my wise little Nance, that I don't care for the set of people the Phillipses will ask."

"I love everybody," said Nance, skipping up and down

the room. "I never met the person yet I didn't love. When I talk to them, all people seem nice, but the most particularly nice person I know after you and dad, mother, is Dorothy. I love Dorothy more than anyone in the world after you and dad."

"Yes, my darling, Dorothy Sharpe is a sweet girl. We must not lose an hour in asking her to come with us. I will write a note this moment, and you shall take it to her. You can ride over to Cadogan Square on your pony, Nance."

"Thank you, mother. I shall like that."

"Then run upstairs and get on your habit, dearest."

Nance raised her lips to her mother's cheek.

"I will run down first to give dad my morning kiss," she exclaimed; "I won't be a moment."

Digby was just preparing to see his first patient when Nance, in her white frock, skipped into the room.

"My darling," he said, glancing at her with a smile, "you must run away now, I am busy."

"Just one kiss, father, and then I am off."

She pressed her lips to his cheek, and he gave her what she was pleased to call his bear's hug. She danced away, to be met in the passage by a footman who was ushering a patient into the doctor's consulting room.

This patient was a lady in black, who wore a crape veil over her face. On seeing Nance she stopped suddenly, and pulled up her veil.

"What a sweet little girl you are!" she exclaimed, with a sort of irrepressible burst of admiration and pleasure. "Who are you? Tell me your name."

"I am Nance, Dr. Digby's little girl."

"My dear," said the lady, "I should so much like to have a kiss from you. Will you kiss me?"

"Of course I will, if you want me to. Are you unhappy? Your face is very pale."

"I do not feel unhappy, my dear, when I look at you."

"I am so glad of that. I am most awfully happy myself. We are just arranging to have a picnic on the Thames and my dearest friend is coming. She is a good deal older than me, but she is quite my dearest friend. Her name is Dorothy Sharpe. I am going to ride over now to see her. Do you happen to know Dorothy Sharpe?"

"No, my little love. I must say good-by now. I am very glad you are so happy."

The lady blew a kiss to Nance with her thin hand. The child smiled up into her face once more, and then ran off to join her mother.

When the door of the consulting room was closed behind this patient, she drew up her veil once more, then turned to Dr. Digby.

"You must forgive my making a remark, sir," she said, "quite irrelevant to the object of my visit. I saw a little girl in a white dress in the passage——"

"My little girl," interrupted Dr. Digby.

"Yes, she told me she was your little girl. Her face attracted me so powerfully that I was obliged to stop and speak to her. An irresistible impulse came over me then, and I asked her to kiss me. She kissed me—I kissed her. I have not kissed a child for fifteen years."

The doctor bowed.

"Fifteen years ago," continued the lady, "I kissed a dead child—my own. She was in her coffin, and there were flowers all over her. Some of them, rosebuds, were touching her white cheeks. I pushed them away and printed my own kiss there instead. Since that hour I have hated all children until I saw your child to-day. Your child has the face of an angel."

"Thank you," replied Digby, "she is a very sweet child. I am glad to tell you, however, that she is quite a little earthly mortal. I trust she has the making of a good woman in her, and we have authority for believing that a good woman is higher than the angels. Now, may I learn the object of your visit?"

He drew a chair forward, asked the lady to seat herself, and began to ask her questions with regard to the state of her health.

"I have come to you," she said, "by the urgent entreaty of many of my friends. All those friends who know anything of the medical profession tell me that you are the very first authority of the day on consumption cases. I have not wished to come to you, for I have felt that you can do me no good. You see I am very frank. I have simply been worried into paying this visit. The importunity of my friends has prevailed, and I have said to myself, 'After Dr. Digby has plainly told me how soon my restless and suffering life will come to an end, I shall cease to be tormented on the subject of possible and unwished-for cure.'"

"Unwished-for cure?" repeated the doctor, raising his brows.

"Yes, my good sir, unwished-for cure. You ought to be glad that I say this, for, of course, you must see for yourself, even before you examine my lungs, that I am far gone in consumption."

"Has any other doctor told you this?"

"No, because you are the first doctor that I have consented to see."

"Will you unfasten your dress and let me apply my stethoscope to your chest?"

The lady pulled off her gloves, and with fingers that slightly shook did as the doctor bade her.

He made the necessary examination, then as she was rearranging her dress, an unexpected remark came from his lips.

"Your lungs are unaffected."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply what I say, my dear madam. I have examined your lungs most carefully, and they are absolutely free from the smallest trace of tubercular disease. You may be dying from some complaint too deep for even the cleverest doctor to fathom, but, as far as I can tell, you have no apparent disease of any sort."

The lady laughed in a harsh kind of way. The color came into her cheeks and then faded. Her eager, rather staring eyes became filled with a fierce light.

"Your verdict is unwelcome," she said shortly. "I am poor; I hate poverty. I am a teacher; I loathe teaching beyond any other employment in the world. Every day I spend my life in the manner most uncongenial to me. I go from house to house, trying to drill knowledge into stupid girls and into stupider boys. I earn enough by this drudgery to keep body and soul together. My soul, which never gets the food it longs for, is hungry, savage, and starved. My body aches day and night. Since my child died I have been seized with a passionate longing to follow her. This longing remains with me day and night. It follows me into my dreams, and colors all I do, and say, and think. For the last year I have noticed that my longing has begun to act on my bodily frame. I have grown most painfully thin, I have lost almost all appetite, I often cough. The hope became almost a conviction that I was really attacked by consumption. Dr. Digby, you are cruel to take my last hope away."

"May I ask your name?" responded the doctor.

"Grey is my name. Mrs. Grey."

"Mrs. Grey, it is my duty to crush the wicked hope which animated your breast. You are unquestionably not consumptive."

"Do you dare to call my hope wicked?"

"I dare to call it very wicked."

"You do not know my story, or you would not speak in that positive way. You cannot guess what a weary, heavy burden life is to me."

Digby's manner suddenly changed; his face grew tender, his eyes full of sympathy.

"Believe me," he said, "that I can guess—believe that I do fully sympathize with you, but also believe me when I say that life is a very precious gift given to you by the Almighty to be used worthily. My dear madam, it is wicked, it is morbid, it is absolutely wrong to be in a hurry to part with such a priceless boon as life. You can make much of it even yet. You are a teacher, you tell me. In that case, you are thrown with the young."

The lady moved impatiently in her chair.

"Yes, yes," she retorted, "people are very fond of recounting the charms of youth. To me, youth means stupidity, a want of consideration, a barbarous and prodigal use of fleeting strength."

"If those are your sentiments," said Digby, "you are a very unfit person to train boys and girls. Your own soul must be frightfully ajar when you can speak as you do. Shall I tell you why your body is ill? Because of the state of your soul. Your soul, or your mind—it is all the same—is in a state of unrest, of strain, of open rebellion."

"What do you mean?" Mrs. Grey fixed her eager eyes on Digby's face.

"What I say is true," he answered tenderly. "Now, I can offer you no prescription for your body, the cure lies with yourself; but as you have come to me I should like to apply some of my knowledge, some of my great experience of human life, to your diseased mind. Will you listen to me?"

"Yes, I will listen. Doctor, I believe you are both an honest and a good man."

"I hope I am honest. As to being good, that is neither here nor there. I am a man who has seen many phases of

life, and sometimes the great privilege and happiness has been given to me to say a few words of strength to souls groping in the dark. Your soul is one of these. It is one of the facts, Mrs. Grey, that science renders more and more plain, day by day, that mind reacts on body. Your body at present is healthy, but how long it will remain so while you persist in kicking against the pricks of circumstances it is impossible for me to decide. Your life is more or less in your own hands; you will be doing a very wicked deed if you throw it away. If you follow my prescription you will become a strong woman, and may live to do good in the world."

"What is your prescription?"

"Before I give it I will ask you a question or two. I presume you are a widow?"

"I am worse than a widow: my husband deserted me many years ago."

"Ah, that is a very bitter fact for you to dwell upon. But your courage will be all the better if you rise above it. You are poor?"

"I have no money expect what I earn, and teaching is not a lucrative profession."

"I know. What about your children?"

"I had one child, she died fifteen years ago."

"Poor soul!" responded the doctor. "Circumstances have undoubtedly been hard on you. But with regard to your child, you are not without hope."

"Hope. What can you mean?"

"Your child has gone into a higher state of existence—she is still yours—you must live up to her. No medicine will do you so much good in all the world as the constantly recurring thought, 'I have a child with God, and I am determined to live worthy of her.' "

Mrs. Grey's eyes filled with tears.

"Thank you," she said softly. "That is a good thought. I will try and hold on to that thought when despair seizes me. It is nice to believe that I can still do something for my child."

"Remember that thought when you are teaching other children," said Digby. "Try and fancy yourself—what I firmly believe will be the truth—nearer to your own child when you help other children to be better. Forget yourself, if possible. Live for the children you teach. Look at them from a new point of view, and they will cease to be common-

place. I can only give you general directions, but love—love to God, love to your dead child—will point out the way. Wish to live—cease to desire to die. As long as God leaves the breath in your body He gives you work. Work for him, work for your child. When you meet her by and by she will look for a beautiful mother: don't disappoint her. Now I must say good-by. No fee, Mrs. Grey; pay me by following my advice."

"You are a good man," replied Mrs. Grey. "Men like you make life possible. You have given me a hard task, but I will try and remember your words." Blinding tears rolled down her cheeks, she pulled her veil over her eyes, and turned away.

After she went out of the room the doctor sighed once or twice.

"Poor woman!" he said to himself. "Have I at all lifted the curtain of suffering from her heart? I had a hard task with her. I would fifty times rather have told her that she would join her child in a month or two."

Digby's next patient was of a totally different type. A fine looking, man between fifty and sixty years of age, with a face of marked intellect, came into the room. The servant handed Digby his card. He took it up, and read the name—Sir Henry Marshall, K. C. B.

"Sit down, Sir Henry," said Digby. "Now, what can I do for you?"

"I want you to give my heart a careful examination. I have been to several London physicians, in especial——" He paused. "The fact is, I have heard of you from the Sharpes." He paused again.

"I know Lady Sharpe very well," said Digby.

"Yes; I dined there last night, and she spoke of you—she urged me to come to you. She assured me that you would give me an absolutely truthful verdict."

"You ought to get that from any doctor."

"I believe you, but the word '*ought*' is not always considered in cases like mine. I come to you asking for a straightforward opinion of my case. Will you examine me?"

"Certainly, if you wish it. But it is only right to tell you that I don't make affections of the heart my speciality."

"I am aware of that fact, but still your opinion would be of value to me."

"I will examine your heart," said Digby.

"Thank you. First of all, I must tell you that other medical men, after careful examination, have told me that the symptoms from which I suffer are not of an alarming character."

"What are the symptoms?"

"A sensation of faintness after any exertion, breathlessness at night, and now and then, at any moment, day or night, quick and sharp pain. I saw a physician yesterday. His words were most reassuring, but there was something in his manner which might have gone down with a woman, but which—well, to be frank with you, I didn't believe in him. He told me that my sensations were mainly attributable to a slight weakness of the heart and to a certain form of indigestion. I went home, and yesterday I dined with the Sharpes. Dorothy Sharpe spoke of you; Lady Sharpe and her husband also mentioned you. On all hands I heard one report: 'He tells the unvarnished truth.' It is most important for me at the present moment to know the truth. I have just been offered a very valuable government appointment in rather an unhealthy part of India. I did not want to take my wife and children there. If I accept this appointment, I shall be parted from them for a few years. The advantages, however, are so many that I am disposed to go if I can take with me a clean bill of health. If your verdict differs from that formed by—by other men, I shall abide by it, and not accept the appointment. Now, Dr. Digby, I have explained the position. I leave myself in your hands."

"You had better consult a heart specialist. This is a very important matter."

"I can please myself about consulting someone else later on. Now, I wish for your verdict."

"You shall have it. Rest assured that I will be perfectly frank with you."

Digby took a considerable time making his examination. At last it was over. He sat down in his chair, and Sir Henry fixed his eyes on his face.

"Well, well," asked the patient, "your truthful verdict?"

Digby looked grave.

"We doctors——" he began.

"No, no, don't preamble. I want the simple, unvarnished truth."

"The simple, unvarnished truth is this, Sir Henry Marshall: You must not accept that foreign appointment."

"Ah! I thought as much." Sir Henry turned pale. "Then that fellow next door lied to me!"

"Do you mean to say that you have consulted Dr. Phillips?" asked Digby.

"I have. I am one of his patients. What is that to you?"

"Only this: I should not have examined you had I known it."

Sir Henry laughed.

"I took care that you didn't know it," he said. "I know all about your beastly medical etiquette, and I was determined to keep the fact that I had previously consulted Dr. Phillips to myself. You are absolutely blameless in the matter. Now for your verdict. Why may I not accept that foreign appointment?"

Digby rose from his chair.

"I have never swerved from a certain opinion," he said. "It is this: Consulting physicians should always tell the unvarnished truth to their patients. In my practice as a consulting doctor I have never diverged from this plan. More than one patient has come to me to whom I have been forced to say, 'It is my painful duty to acquaint you with the fact that life and the things of life are practically over for you.' There may be reasons why a family physician will think it best to suppress this knowledge in all its fulness."

"Yes, yes," interrupted Sir Henry. "I know, without your saying any more, that your verdict in my case will be an evil one."

"That depends upon how you take it, Sir Henry. Just before you came into this room a lady sat in that chair. She begged of me to tell her how soon kind death would come and set her free from her miseries. I had to say to her, 'Prepare to live.' To you, Sir Henry Marshall, another message is given."

"Yes, I know, I know," said Sir Henry. He took his handkerchief out of his pocket, and wiped his pale face. "Life is full of attractions to me," he continued. "How long—how long do you give me before the inevitable arrives?"

"It is impossible for me to tell you that. You are suffering from a dangerous disease of the heart. The aortic valve, the most important of all the heart valves, is seriously affected. Should this cause your death, when it comes it will be sudden and probably painless."

It took but a moment or two for Sir Henry to recover his composure. Then he said:

"I won't deny that you have dealt me a blow."

"It has given me great pain to deal it to you," answered Digby.

"Pray don't apologize. I came here for an honest opinion; I have got it. Good-day, sir."

"I must add that I am sorry you consulted me. Phillips is my next door neighbor, and his wife and my wife are friends. I should have preferred that a stranger had seen his patient."

"Oh, if it puts you out, I will make it straight with him. I will tell him that you are blameless. By Jove! though, what a liar the fellow must be. Either he is a liar or he is an incompetent doctor."

"Do not be hard upon him; he may have hidden the truth from you for matters of expediency. Doctors do not always reveal the full hideousness of the skeleton."

"He is not even a family doctor. I came to him as I came to you—for a consultation. I repeat, I have no patience with him. Now, good-day, sir."

"Do not trouble about seeing Dr. Phillips," said Digby. "I will talk the matter over with him myself. Now, would you not like me to give you a few directions?"

"Directions?" repeated Sir Henry. "I do not think they are necessary. I know the sort of thing that is always said to men who have incurable heart disease. 'Never hurry, take care of your digestion, keep your mind calm, bar the door against anxieties.' Oh, pshaw! I shall not mind all that humbug."

"It is not humbug, Sir Henry Marshall. By following such simple directions as you have yourself quoted you may keep death at bay for many a long year."

"Thanks. That is your idea of a life of enjoyment? The sword of Damocles forever hanging over my head? I prefer not. I shall decline the foreign appointment and spend what time is left me with my wife and children. For that period, be it long or short, we will eat, drink, and be merry."

"Your feelings may alter as time goes on," said Digby. "It is one of the facts taught by experience that men and women get accustomed to anything. The knowledge that you may die suddenly will not affect you greatly in three months' time. I knew a man with a heart like yours ten years ago."

He is alive now, and, for aught I can tell, may continue to live for another ten years."

"Or he may die to-morrow?" said Sir Henry.

"Quite so; he may die to-day or to-morrow."

"You are an honest man. I respect you. Your friend next door is a humbug."

"My acquaintance," corrected Digby.

Sir Henry laughed.

"Ah! I did not suppose you and that humbug would be friends. What communion is there between light and darkness? Good-by, Dr. Digby; I shall be sure to bring any of my family, if they happen to be ill, to see you. Here is your fee. My thanks—my sincere thanks."

CHAPTER III.

THE TALK OF THE CLUB.

"Is anything the matter, James?" asked Dr. Phillips's pretty wife. He was standing by the window in their large and beautifully furnished drawing room. Helen Phillips, a slim and childish looking creature still, looked timidly up at him as she spoke.

"Nothing, nothing," he replied pettishly. "A man need not wear a continual smile, need he, Helen?"

"Oh, no; it is not that. I have learned to read your face, James."

"Then unlearn the accomplishment, my dear. I hate having my face studied."

Helen gave a sigh, quickly smothered. She was a pretty woman, essentially pretty, but her face, still childish in outline, looked to those who knew her well a little hard. The eyes wore a strained expression, and the smile round the lips was too habitual to be absolutely pleasing.

Phillips glanced at his wife in a half contemptuous way.

"What a small creature you are!" he said, chucking her under the chin. "You don't grow either in mind or body. How long is it since I married you? Let me see, over seven years ago. You were eighteen then, you are twenty-five now. You look eighteen still, with a difference."

"What do you mean, James?"

"I mean this. Anyone who knew you well would say, 'Something has stopped that woman's development,' that is

all. Now I am going down to my study for an hour or two. For goodness' sake don't follow me, and don't imagine there is the smallest thing wrong."

"I am sorry I spoke, James. You have a habit of—of crushing me; that is why I have never grown. Oh, I don't complain; I love you dearly, and you are never really unkind to me, but you won't let me talk to you as Cecilia talks to her husband. If Laurence Digby's face looked careworn he would allow Cecilia to remark on it. He would not pretend that there was nothing the matter."

A great color came into Helen's cheeks as she was speaking. The color brought sparkles to her eyes, and the habitual smile round her lips was changed to an expression of petulance and pain. Phillips watched her as she spoke—her words were little or nothing to him, but the swift change in her face aroused his passing admiration.

"It is all a matter of looks," he said. "Your friend Cecilia shows her soul when she speaks—a thousand emotions flit across her face, whereas you!—— I should like to know what man likes to confide in a doll? Look as you did this moment, my love, and you will win confidence from me when I have any to give."

"James," said his wife, "you have no right to compare me to a doll. I thought you loved me when you married me."

"Don't begin that stupid old tune, Helen; of course I loved you. I will frankly confess that I thought there was more in you than there has turned out to be. But it is impossible for anyone to exceed the limits assigned to them. Your brain is small and good, your nature is small and good. You are excellent as far as you go, but you don't go very far. Talk about Digby confiding in his wife! Good God! if I had married that woman, shouldn't I, too, confide in her? Had your friend Cecilia been my wife we should have had a great future together. The fact is, all marriages are not made in heaven. Digby was mated wrong, and his wife was mated wrong; she is thrown away on a man like Digby. He is too—too scrupulous. He does not see the advantage he possesses in a wife with such a splendid intellect."

Helen gazed at her husband in absolute wonder.

"You won't make me jealous of Cecilia," she said at last, in her rather thin but sweet voice. "I love her more and more every year, and I am truly glad that you admire her. I don't profess to understand the queer things you say now

and then; I can't help not being very clever. But one thing does pain me, James. Your tone seems to imply that you are not happy—that you are not satisfied."

"Satisfied!" retorted Phillips. "Who would be satisfied with mediocrity? There, Helen, don't keep me, I am going down to my study. I have some work to get through."

"You must not leave me in this fashion," she exclaimed, roused to a passing fit of unhappiness by his taunting words. "I shall cry all the time you are away from me if you leave me like this. You must tell me why you are unhappy."

"I never said I was unhappy."

"Why you are not satisfied."

"Helen, look here." James Phillips put his two hands on his wife's slim shoulders; he turned her round so that the light fell on her small face. "Look here," he said, giving her a little shake as he spoke, "I will just lift the corner of the curtain and give you a peep at the heart in my breast; if you don't like the picture, it is your own fault. I am devoured by jealousy. I hate Laurence Digby! He has got everything, I have nothing."

"Nothing, James, nothing? Please don't pinch my shoulders like that. You have lots of money, and everyone says how handsome you are, and all your patients like you, and you have more patients than you know how to visit, and your house is beautiful, and people speak of me as a good and pretty wife. What can you want more?"

"Poor Helen," said Phillips, releasing his grasp of his wife, "that is all you know. I want a child, for one thing. You have no child."

"Oh, don't! you hurt me," she said, turning away as he said this. She went up to the window, and stood against the curtain, her slim figure trembling.

"Digby has one child," continued Phillips. "He will have trouble over that child. She won't live—quite safe not to live—but for the present she is a sunbeam in his house. He has a wife who grows more beautiful every day. Oh! I have nothing to say against your looks, Helen. You are pretty, you are always pretty; your eyes are always bright, your cheeks have roses in them every hour of the day. You are irreproachable in your dress, and your smile is most ladylike. A man glances at you. 'What a pretty woman!' he exclaims; 'how sweetly she smiles!' He looks away. Again he looks up. Still the pretty woman, still the smile. His attention is

diverted, but he glances back again by and by. The roses are still in your cheeks, the identical smile plays round your lips, your eyes stare at him as a doll's bright, empty eyes might stare. He gets tired of that unvarying expression. Can you blame him, poor wretch? Man is a creature who needs various foods.

"Digby's wife is also pretty—perhaps, in the strictest sense of the word, not so pretty as you. Her nose, for instance—we will say nothing about her nose. Her eyes, too; they are not so dark. Well, she also goes out, and a man notices her. He says in passing, 'What an erect carriage! what a sweet, proud face!' He looks away, but, impelled by something, he bestows another glance. The face looks thunderous now, the eyes shine with passion, the color comes and goes in the cheeks. He says to himself, 'By Jove! I shouldn't like to have much to say to that woman.' But behold, in another instant he sees her bending over her child—her face has the tenderness of a Madonna, her smile is divine in its beauty. That woman has a thousand moods, a thousand glances to bestow upon the man she loves. My dear, my dear, you can't understand my talk, can you?"

"No, James. I think you must be getting fever or something of that sort. You are talking in a very wild, queer way. I will forgive you, for I know you are really fond of me; but that kind of talk about Cecilia seems very foolish, and I didn't listen to half you said."

"What a blessed little thing you are, Nell!" Phillips went up to Helen and kissed her. "After all," he said, "there are certain blessings that accompany a commonplace wife. Had I said the kind of things to Cecilia Digby that I said to you just now, I should be in danger of being stabbed to-night; whereas *you*, you good-natured little butterfly, you don't even take in my torrent of abuse."

"But you do love me, James?"

"Yes, yes, my dear. You are the best little soul."

"I'd give anything to have a child, too."

"We'll drop that subject, if you please."

"James, did you order the steam launch?"

"Yes. I wrote about it."

"Shall I read you the list of guests I have invited?"

"No, it doesn't matter. You can ask whom you please."

"I thought we might as well ask the Marshalls—you know Sir Henry is your new patient. We dined at their house

last week, and Lady Marshall and Violet and Daisy would be very glad to come. We might ask Mr. Dacre, too. He seemed very attentive to Violet Marshall the other evening."

"That's right, Helen. You will make a capital little matchmaker. I am rather pleased at your idea of including the Marshalls among the guests. You have some sense in your small pate."

"By the way, James, I saw Sir Henry Marshall's carriage this morning at the Digbys' door."

Phillips colored.

"At the Digbys' door, my dear?" he said. "You must have made a mistake."

"No, I am quite positive. I happened to be standing on the balcony at the time. It was about half past eleven this morning, and I saw the Marshalls' carriage drive up. I knew it by the servants' livery, and, of course, I expected it to stop at our door, but to my surprise it drew up at forty-eight, and I saw Sir Henry get out. He went into the house, and stayed there about half an hour. I was in the balcony again when he came out. I watched him get into his carriage. He looked very queer—as if he was ill. Is Sir Henry Marshall very ill, James?"

"Not that I know of. At least—of course, men don't consult doctors if they are quite well. Sir Henry must have called to see Digby as a friend; although it was a strange hour, and I never knew that they were acquaintances."

The drawing-room door was opened, and a servant came up and spoke to Phillips.

"Mr. Duke is in the consulting room, sir. He wishes to see you for a minute or two."

"Excuse me," Phillips said to his wife. "I shall not be long. I hope Mrs. Duke is no worse."

He ran downstairs, entered his consulting room, and shut the door behind him.

The Dukes were some of his best patients. He was, therefore, particularly polite to the man who now stood by his table and apologized for troubling him at so late an hour.

"It is nothing of much importance," said Mr. Duke, "but my wife got rather fidgety. She asked me to call about that last prescription." He then described a certain effect which the medicine had produced on his wife.

"I will alter one of the ingredients," said Phillips. "Mrs. Duke's experience is a very common one."

He sat down by his table, took up a pen, made the necessary alterations, and returned the paper to Mr. Duke.

"By the way," remarked that gentleman, "I have just left the club to come in to see you. Were you there this evening?"

"No, I happened to be particularly busy; I don't often visit my club in the evening."

"Sir Henry Marshall was there. You know him, don't you?"

Phillips remembered Helen's words. An intuition of something unpleasant suddenly seized him. He changed color, and answered in an interested but guarded tone.

"I know Marshall," he said. "Mrs. Phillips and I dined at his house a fortnight ago."

"Well, it seems that Sir Henry was offered the Governorship of Guawliow, in the Burnhay Presidency. It was a first-class appointment, and he was all agog to be off (an ambitious fellow, Sir Henry, very). He was at the club to-night in no end of a rage—I never saw anyone in such a pepper in my life. Very bad for him, I should say."

"But what was he angry about?" asked Phillips. "May I offer you a cigar, Duke?"

"Thanks." There was a brief pause. Phillips repeated his question.

"What raised Sir Henry's ire?" he asked. "I know the man; he interests me."

"He has a great deal to say for himself—he is a clever fellow, very. Well, the cause of the rumpus was this. He had been to some doctor here, in this very street—fancied he had got heart disease—you know how nervous some fellows get on that point. The doctor assured him that he was sound as a bell. Sir Henry went off, apparently satisfied, but as his uneasy sensations continued, and the acceptance of the appointment hung in the balance, he thought he'd see Digby. You know Digby, of course, your next-door neighbor—everyone knows that he's about the brusquest man in the profession. Well, he examined Sir Henry this morning, and told him practically that he was a doomed man. Sir Henry has refused the appointment, and is telling the story all over the place, with additions, no doubt. What is the matter, Phillips? You look pale."

"I may well look pale," retorted Phillips. "I happen to be the doctor whom Sir Henry first consulted."

"By Jove! You don't mean to say you told him there was nothing up with him?"

"There are cases when it is much the wisest thing for a doctor to conceal the truth."

"Do you think so? I cannot say that I agree with you. Did he tell you that he was going to India?"

"Yes. He'd have been as well in India as here."

"Digby seemed to think differently. I must say frankly that I think Digby was right to make no bones about the matter. You must forgive me, Phillips, but it does seem the most straightforward thing to let a man know when he is on the brink of a precipice. He leaps over all the sooner by being kept in the dark. Good-night, good-night. I wouldn't have told you, of course, if I had any idea that you were the man, but Sir Henry is making the deuce of a row—I never saw anyone in a greater rage."

"It is unpleasant, of course," said Phillips, in his calmest tone, "but I did my duty according to my light, and no man can do more."

"No, if that is your way of looking at it. Well, good-night, again. I will get this prescription made up for my wife. It's all right now, isn't it?"

"Perfectly right."

Mr. Duke went away, but Phillips did not return to his wife. He paced up and down his consulting room with some of the feelings that may be supposed to occupy the breast of a caged tiger. After a time he sat down and scribbled a few lines to Digby:

"MY DEAR DIGBY: A patient of mine has just called. He has given me a piece of gossip which I confess is somewhat unpleasant. Perhaps you can set matters straight; at any rate I should like to have full particulars with regard to your interview with Sir Henry Marshall this morning. You can scarcely have been unaware of the fact that he was one of my patients. It seems that he is making a fuss at his club over the different diagnoses of two well-known West End doctors.

"Yours truly,

"JAMES PHILLIPS."

The note was put into an envelope and directed. Phillips sounded a gong on his table, and the servant who answered the summons was desired to take it to No. 48, and wait for

an answer. The reply came back in less than ten minutes:

"MY DEAR PHILLIPS: I am sorry that Marshall is talking of this matter. It was an unfortunate dilemma, but I can clear myself from any wish to deprive you of a patient by telling you the simple fact that I had not the least idea Sir Henry Marshall had ever consulted you until after I had examined his heart. He told me then that he had done so, and gave me at the same time an account of your diagnosis. It was impossible for me to conceal the fact from him that I regarded his case in a totally different light. I told Sir Henry Marshall what I believe to be the truth, that he is a doomed man.

"Yours,

"LAURENCE DIGBY."

All the demon in Phillips's heart leaped into his eyes as he read this letter. He walked up and down his room several times. Cold beads of perspiration stood upon his forehead, and his great frame absolutely shook with the anger which ran through his veins.

His first impulse was to refuse to believe Digby's statement that he had examined Sir Henry in ignorance of the fact that he was Phillips's patient, but his anger did not grow less when he was forced to admit that Digby was the last man in the world to do anything discourteous to a brother physician. He hated Digby for taking his patient from him, and he hated him all the more because he knew in his heart that Digby was really blameless in the matter.

The facts of the case were these:

Phillips was one of those doctors who prophesy smooth things. Such men are often popular in the profession, and with a very large class of patients, whose diseases may be set down as nervous affections, his diagnosis was often attended with the happiest results. Phillips had been much pleased when Sir Henry Marshall, a man of considerable distinction, called to see him. He read the man's fears in his eyes, and determined to allay them. Phillips did not possess Digby's accurate ear, but he was well aware that the opinion which he uttered was a false one; Sir Henry's heart was in anything but a healthy condition. Sir Henry asked him the truth, and Phillips looked in his face and told him a direct lie. Had

Phillips even guessed for an instant that his patient of to-day would become Laurence Digby's patient of to-morrow, his verdict would have been a different one. This remote possibility had never for a moment flashed through his brain. He was thunderstruck, alarmed, fiercely angry. In his anger he was unjust; he made up his mind to treat Digby as if he did not believe him.

Phillips had little or no sense of honor, and he wondered if he could make a good story out of this. It might be possible for him to write a letter to the *Lancet* or the *Medical Journal*—a letter which would show up the case in a doubtful light, and render Digby's position an unpleasant one.

Phillips had a certain knack of writing cleverly. It did not take him an instant to compose a venomous and witheringly sarcastic letter in his own mind. He muttered the sentences half aloud as they formed themselves in his brain.

He would state a general case, and ask for the opinions of the Press. Digby's name, of course, should be withheld, but such a thin veil would be cast over his identity that his brothers in the profession would read through the disguise at a glance.

A savage gleam came into Phillips's eyes as the results of his letter came before him in imagination. He thought to himself of the many nice points which it would raise with regard to one doctor completely setting aside the known diagnosis of another. Phillips fancied that his letter would excite a wide correspondence, that this correspondence would help to degrade Digby and lower him in his profession.

"Yes," he said to himself, "I will not believe for a moment that talk about not knowing. I am almost sure that he has heard me speak of Sir Henry as one of my latest patients—he didn't choose to know. He was but too glad to take my patient, and to humiliate me in his eyes. Had he acted uprightly, he would have refused to give Sir Henry Marshall an opinion. This is my reward after all I have done for him! Yes, I will write to the *Lancet*, I will write to-night."

But, as Phillips sat at his desk, other thoughts came to mitigate the rapture with which he had received his daring idea of revenge. Digby had always been indifferent to the opinions of other doctors. When censured he would be the first to defend himself, and armed with that horrible sledge hammer of truth, which he was well known always to carry, he

might, in his turn, make unpleasant disclosures with regard to Phillips.

For Phillips to examine a man's heart and pronounce it sound, and for Digby the very next day to discover that that same heart was affected with a fatal disease, would be anything but a pleasant episode to get talked about.

Phillips knew in his heart that, whether Digby was liked by his brethren or the reverse, his opinion would be regarded without a moment's hesitation as the correct verdict.

Phillips threw down his pen as these thoughts rushed through his mind, and again began to pace his room.

Suddenly a fresh idea came to him. He resolved to act upon it at once. After all, he might work this thing to his best advantage. He opened the study door, and ran up to the drawing room.

"Helen," he said, "put something over your head and come in with me to see the Digbys."

"Why, James," she said, looking up at him in astonishment, "surely not to-night? It is nearly ten o'clock."

"What of that? Where is the use of being neighbors if we are not friendly? Come along, do not stand there with that moonstruck expression on your face. Here, you can put this lace shawl over your head. Come, what are you lingering for?"

"If we must go, I thought I should like to take these wools and silks in to show Cecilia. Have you seen them? The shades are exquisite."

"My dear, what do I know of shades of wool?"

"Well, Cecilia will like to look at them. Wait a minute, James. I want to wrap them up in this piece of paper. Cecilia has such lovely taste that I should like to ask her opinion about my embroidery."

"You will do nothing of the kind. Leave the wools and silks where they are. Listen to me, Helen. When you get into that drawing room you are to set your woman's wits to work—you are to help *me*, do you hear?"

"To help you? My dear James, you know I shall be delighted."

"I am glad to hear it. You are to use the amount of brains allotted to you to their utmost. Talk to Digby, and keep him at the other end of the drawing room. I want to say something to your friend, Cecilia. It is important, and I do not wish anyone to hear. Now, come along."

A frightened look crept over Helen Phillips's face. She left her wools and silks on the little work-table by her own special chair, wrapped her scarf round her head, and accompanied her husband to No. 48.

The clock from the neighboring church struck ten as the two mounted the steps.

The weather was hot at this time—the period of the year was midsummer. The Digbys were sitting in their balcony, but came into the drawing room when Phillips and his wife were announced.

"This is really good of you," said Digby, shaking hands with Helen, and then taking Phillips cordially by the hand. "I am delighted to see you, Phillips—I am anxious to explain that matter you wrote to me about. Will you come down to my consulting room?"

"I do not think it is necessary to enter into the subject to-night," said Phillips, in a gentle, restrained sort of voice. "Your letter gave the one *all-important* explanation. You did not know that Sir Henry was my patient. We will talk over the case to-morrow, if you have no objection, but to-night!—I have a prejudice against bringing my patients' names on the *tapis* in a drawing room. I like to forget all about them when I am not in the consulting room or the hospital."

"I doubt, for my part," said Digby, "if a doctor can ever allow the somber mantle of knowledge to drop from his shoulders, but, as you wish it, we will defer our talk until to-morrow."

Cecilia was standing at the other end of the drawing room. Helen was looking into her face and chatting in her light, easy way. Occasionally Cecilia laughed, and Helen smiled up at her, lost in the love and admiration which she always felt for her friend.

Digby allowed no gas in his drawing room, but plenty of shaded lamps shed their softened light over the scene. Wax candles were lit here and there on brackets, the piano stood open, and little Nance's violin—the child had a passion for music—lay upon a chair.

No room could look more homelike, more rich with the wealth of money and the greater wealth of intelligence and love.

The two men walked up the drawing room. Phillips immediately addressed a question to Cecilia. He moved aside two or three steps as he did so, and she was forced, somewhat unwillingly, to follow him.

"Dr. Digby," said Helen, a nervous tremor in her voice, "do you know anything whatever of the arrangement of blues and greens in an embroidery pattern?"

"I cannot say I do, Mrs. Phillips. On such purely domestic matters you must consult my wife. Cecilia, my love."

But Cecilia's ears were not given to Digby just then.

"I am anxious to say a word to you," said Phillips.

"What about?" she asked, astonishment in her tone.

"A matter of importance. Will you come on the balcony for a moment? The night is warm."

Digby felt a passing wonder as Phillips and Cecilia stepped on the balcony, but Helen's evident and unwonted nervousness arrested his attention.

He said to himself:

"The poor little woman has something on her mind. She is not remarkable for genius at any time, but I never heard her talk in quite so disjointed a fashion as she is doing to-night."

Helen went on stammering futile little remarks about her embroidery. Digby said cheerfully:

"I cannot counsel you. The matter lies altogether in your woman's kingdom, into which I never knowingly enter. I have something to show you; come and look at Nance's last photograph."

Helen exclaimed in relief, and Digby and she went to the other end of the drawing room. Phillips and Cecilia were now, to all intents and purposes, alone.

On this special evening Cecilia wore a long, perfectly plain dress of ivory silk. Her bright hair was coiled round her head without any attempt at ornament. Her high, white dress was fastened at the throat with a pearl brooch. As she looked up at Phillips in the moonlight, her slender figure, her rather pale face, and the dark shadows which even a passing fear brought out under her eyes, gave her that spiritual look which now and then seemed to surround her like a sort of mystery.

Phillips felt his admiration increase, but he was also sensible of a dim fear as he talked to her.

"Do you know," he said suddenly, "that your husband did me a serious injury to-day?"

"My husband? Laurence injured you? Quite impossible."

"A fact, nevertheless, Mrs. Digby. A most patent fact."

My patient, Sir Henry Marshall, came to this house. He asked Digby to give him a medical opinion without telling him that he had previously consulted me. Digby examined Sir Henry and, most unfortunately, reversed my verdict in each particular."

"Because your verdict was wrong."

Phillips colored angrily.

"That is a wife's way of putting it," he said. "Your husband made his examination before he knew the true facts of the case, but he did not give his verdict before he knew that Sir Henry was my patient. When he knew, he should have withheld his own opinion unless it coincided with mine. The whole matter is very unpleasant, and your husband has done me an irreparable injury."

"I fail to see how. My husband naturally gave a truthful verdict. Truth has always been the *first* consideration in his mind; at the same time, he would willingly injure no one. Go and talk the matter over with him; he will soon set things straight for you."

"He can never set things straight. Sir Henry is speaking of the matter already. It will be noised abroad in the profession that Dr. Phillips said one thing of Sir Henry Marshall and Dr. Digby said another. I will admit to you, Mrs. Digby, that your husband stands higher as a medical man than I do."

Cecilia's eyes gleamed with sudden pleasure.

"You admit that now?" she said. "There was a time when you did not think so well of my husband."

"There was never a time that I did not in my heart think him the cleverest and most original man I knew. You do not suppose, however, that we *like* the people we are bound to admit in our secret souls to be our superiors?"

"I confess I do not understand you. Why do you talk to me about this?"

"Because you alone can give me reparation."

"Reparation for what? I fail to see where you have been injured. You make a complaint without cause; my husband did not willingly deprive you of a patient, but, even if he did, you surely are not so poor and not so unknown as to feel the loss to any considerable extent."

"Good heavens!" retorted Phillips. "The loss of a patient is a mere flea-bite. It is absolutely nothing to me if I never see Sir Henry again. Can you not understand where the in-

jury lies? It lies in the fact that your husband made one diagnosis and I made the opposite."

"Oh," said Cecilia, a proud light coming into her eyes, "this is not the first time that my husband has proved his knowledge superior to yours."

"Mrs. Digby, I confess it. Your husband is a much greater doctor than I am. His ear is more true, his knowledge more profound, he can see farther and deeper into the marvelous mechanism of the human frame than I can. I, too, have studied, I, too, have worked, but not——"

"Not with his motives," interrupted Cecilia. "Laurence has always searched for truth—he has lived for truth, and he loves his profession next best to his God."

"You are right," said Phillips.

"It seems unworthy of you, Dr. Phillips," said Cecilia, "to vent your petty spite on a man like my husband."

"Ah!" said Phillips, "did you never understand that a man like your husband could be cordially hated?"

"Do you cordially hate him?"

"I refuse to say anything on the subject—I leave you to judge."

The moonlight was now shining full on the balcony, and the faces of the speakers were each visible to the other. Both faces were pale and full of emotion. Between them both there now fell a silence, while quick thoughts whirled through the two brains. Cecilia was the first to speak.

"You have always been a puzzle to me," she said slowly. "Your apparent cordiality to my husband this evening, and your wish for a private conversation with me, in which you reverse all the friendly words you have spoken to him, puzzle me as I have never been puzzled before."

"Ah, I thought you would say something of that sort," laughed Phillips.

"You have a motive for this conversation," continued Cecilia, "which you have not yet revealed. Say at once what you wish to say, or I shall return to the drawing room."

"Give me a moment: I am coming to my motive."

"State it to me in a few words then—I don't need to have your subject gently broken. You are about to do something cruel—deal your blow without any further preamble."

"You are unjust to me, Mrs. Digby."

"Speak!" said Cecilia, stamping her foot.

"What I wish to say is this. Your husband has taken

something from me: he has taken—what I, as a medical man, deeply prize—a certain part of my reputation away. I do not know how far the injury he has done will spread—it may be very serious, it may, on the contrary, be small—but, be it large or small, I ask the reparation at your hands, not at his.”

“How? How is it possible for me to repair the injury you imagine you have received?”

“Pray, leave out the word ‘imagine,’ Mrs. Digby.”

“How am I to help you?”

Phillips came a little nearer.

“Mrs. Digby, I have more than once alluded to the subject I am now going to speak of. Your husband has, unwittingly, we will allow, dealt a serious blow to my reputation. There is a way in which I can regain it. Years ago Digby made a discovery of a very important character. For some inconceivable reason it lies idle, unused, unknown. Get him to talk the matter over with me. Induce your husband with all your woman’s wiles to give me his confidence, to share his secret with me, and this unpleasant episode shall be at once forgotten, and I will become in reality what the world now thinks me, Digby’s greatest friend.”

“My husband will never do what you wish,” said Cecilia. “If he has a secret, he has his own best reasons for keeping it to himself. It is useless for me to stir in the matter. I cannot possibly help you.”

“You can, if you please. There is nothing under the sun that a woman like you cannot make a man do for her.”

“Thank you for your opinion of my power. Suppose I refuse to use it?”

“Do you know,” said Phillips, “why I have been kind to you? I have been consistently kind—you will admit that!”

“You have. I have often wondered why, but I deny nothing that is true.”

“I had a motive.”

“I guessed as much.”

“I will tell you frankly what my motive was and is. I never cared for Digby, but nevertheless I used all the means in my power to induce him to come to this house. When he came I made matters smooth for him. It so happened that it lay in my power to introduce your husband to the class of patients who would be sure to appreciate his sterling merit.

Practically I got him his connection. He owes his very successful career to me."

"You have done much for him, undoubtedly, Dr. Phillips, but I deny that he owes his career altogether to you. He owes it also to his brains, to his sympathy, to his goodness, to his truth."

"Yes, yes, but these things don't go far unaided. I repeat, your husband owes his connection primarily to me. Do you suppose that one doctor does as much, as a rule, for another? Does he do it for the man who has slighted him, wounded his pride, and hurt his vanity? The most Christian man who ever walked would draw the line at that. I am not a Christian man—I am worldly to the backbone. Do you suppose I have done what I have for nothing?"

"No," responded Cecilia. "You would not be Dr. Phillips if you had."

Phillips's dark face assumed an ugly expression.

"I will tell you what I did it for," he said. "I did it for the sake of future reputation. I did it because there is no man living more devoured by ambition than I am. Your husband cares nothing for fame, he is without ambition. He possesses a secret which, if known, would make his name a word of blessing on the lips of all men. I want to share his secret and his renown. Now you know; I have spoken."

"Yes." Cecilia's tone was like ice. "I am sorry for you," she said; "your quest is vain."

Phillips's face grew paler.

"I can become just as unpleasant as I have been pleasant," he said. "For instance, do you remember the brougham which I paid for? Your husband knows nothing of this."

"He knows nothing," she said. "I have never told him. I have been wrong, perhaps, but it would pain him to know."

"My dear lady, don't excite yourself. I paid for the brougham also with a motive. I have the receipts; I can show them to you or to Digby any day. The matter remains with yourself. You understand me?"

"I certainly fully understand you. But you know me very little if you think threats can move me. Even if I could induce myself to speak to my husband on the subject to which you have alluded, it would be absolutely useless, for Laurence has often told me that he would not talk of his scientific research to anyone."

"If you wished it he would do so. You don't half realize

your power; no woman that I have ever met holds more in her hands than you do; as to Digby, you have but to say the word, and he will obey."

"I am proud to say that he will not. If I were capable of saying a wrong thing to my husband he would show me my error, but he would not lose his goodness for my sake. Above all things in the world, I am proud of him for this."

"Cecilia!" called Digby's voice from the drawing room, "the night has turned colder; you and Phillips had better come in."

Cecilia returned to the drawing room at once. Phillips followed her.

"You are right, Digby," he said, in a cordial voice. "I hope Mrs. Digby has taken no chill. We were having an interesting conversation, and forgot the lateness of the hour."

CHAPTER IV.

PHILLIPS'S EVIL GENIUS.

At last the day arrived when the Digbys and the Phillipses were to have their water picnic.

They were to go by train to Kingston, and there go on board the launch which would be waiting for them. The party were to have a picnic dinner on board, and would return in the evening for supper to the "Star and Garter" at Richmond.

Everything had been planned to perfection, and as the guests who had accepted the invitation were many of them special friends of Mrs. Digby's, she looked forward to a far pleasanter time than she had anticipated a fortnight ago.

The morning of this day, which was fraught with so many and such grave results, dawned with a cloudless sky. Cecilia put on her festive dress with a gay heart, and laughed with delight when Nance, in soft white from her bright head to her dainty feet, danced into the room.

Cecilia, too, was in white, and the mother and child as they stood together bore a certain resemblance to each other.

Between these two faces so widely different—between these natures so apart in all essentials—there was ever noticed by those who watched them, this fleeting, fluctuating, queer resemblance. It flashed out of the two pairs of eyes and then

disappeared. Its sweetness lingered in the voice of the child, to be caught up in a sort of echo by the mother.

People saw it, and remarked on it, and then vowed that they had never seen it, and never remarked on it.

"How comes it that Mrs. Digby's child is not the least like her?" one neighbor said.

"Anyone can tell that those two are mother and daughter," remarked another.

Now, holding Nance's hand, Cecilia ran down and knocked at the consulting-room door.

One of Digby's rules was never to see any but his poor patients on Saturday, and the hour for these to come and go was long past.

He called, "Come in," when he heard the knock, and Nance flew like a little soft breeze to his side.

"Laurence," said his wife, "you ought to have changed your coat; it is almost time for us to start; the carriage will be round in about five minutes."

"Here's a mess," said Digby, holding out an open telegram. "Ray has just wired to me to say that that poor fellow, Harper—you remember Harper, Cecilia? the waterman in whom I was so much interested when we lived in Coxmoor Street?—is very ill, dying in fact. He has been asking for me all night, poor fellow, so Ray wired to know if I could come. I have just told Jacobs to whistle for a hansom."

"O Laurence, really——" began Cecilia.

The words which her lips had not uttered were checked by a displeased flash from her husband's eyes.

"Stay one moment, father," cried Nance. She rushed out of the room, returning in almost an instant with her two hands filled with roses—great crimson and pink blossoms in every stage of growth.

"Won't you take these to poor Harper, father?" she said. "He'll have lots of them in heaven, I know—much nicer ones, and they won't wither—but perhaps he'd like these; and you can say that your little girl gave them to you for him, will you, father? Perhaps he'd like me to send him a kiss, too, if he's very bad."

"The cab is at the door, sir," said Jacobs, appearing for an instant with the precision of a wooden soldier, and disappearing.

"Do take the roses, father," said Nance.

Digby detached one magnificent blossom from the rest.

"Kiss it, Nance," he said. "Once, twice, thrice. Poor Harper will be glad of this rose. Good-by, my darling. Good-by, Cecilia, dear."

"But, Laurence, aren't you coming at all? Are we to spend a long day without you?"

"By no means. Let me see, I can join you at Thames Ditton. Look out for me there between two and three o'clock. Now, I'm off; good-by, both of you."

A few moments later Cecilia stepped into her carriage, and, with Nance by her side, was whirled away to Waterloo Station. There several friends met them, and a train quickly conveyed the entire party to Kingston-on-Thames. The steam launch was a large one, and every possible arrangement for the comfort of the party had been made.

A brass band came on board, awnings were erected over the deck, dinner and other refreshments were to be provided. The programme for the day's pleasure was as perfect as good taste and money could make it.

Several of Cecilia's special friends were among the invited guests. She welcomed, and was welcomed herself, with enthusiasm. She was far and away the most attractive looking woman on board the launch, and Nance was by many degrees the most lovely child.

Phillips watched the two with an undefined sense of pleasure. He felt that, to a certain extent, he had Cecilia in his power. He had no idea of carrying matters to extremities, but he was quite unscrupulous enough to be willing to give pain, if it were necessary to effect his object.

Lady Sharpe came over, and began to talk to Mrs. Digby.

"It is a great disappointment not to see your husband," she said. "I will frankly say that the hope of meeting him was the great inducement that brought me here to-day."

"Dr. Digby hopes to join us in the afternoon," replied Cecilia.

"Oh, yes, yes; but if he is interested in a case of serious illness is it likely that he will leave it for a scene of pleasure? No, Mrs. Digby, I am too well acquainted with that good husband of yours to believe such a thing possible."

"He will certainly not come if his presence is necessary elsewhere," answered Cecilia. Then she added, with a profound sigh: "I will own that I, too, am bitterly disappointed. Wives of doctor have many trials."

"Yes, my dear, yes. But the wives of doctors like your

husband have also many honors. There are compensations in all things. You can never look at that good man whose wife you are without a sense of pride."

"I know. It gives me immense pleasure to know how you, too, appreciate him."

Lady Sharpe seated herself on a deck chair.

"Let us have a little chat here all by ourselves," she said; "the rest of the party are ravished with the view, but I have often seen this part of the Thames. I know every curve of the river. I admit its beauty, but I need not talk about it to-day. I want to have a pleasant time with you. Do you see Dorothy over there? She is talking to your little daughter; she is very fond of Nance."

"I know, and Nance is fond of her. Dorothy looks well, Lady Sharpe. What a blooming color she has; what a bright expression."

"Yes," replied the mother, "and we owe it all to your husband. I shall never forget the first time I visited 48 Hartrick Street. The memory of that day has burnt into my heart. I went there full of hope. You can scarcely understand the sick fear which had been mine for many and many a day; the agony with which I listened to my child every time she coughed, the terror that possessed me when I saw the faintest symptom of ill health about her. Then I heard certain words, and I went to your husband full of hope. Mrs. Digby, there never in all the world was a sorer heart than mine when I left Dr. Digby's consulting room that day. He spoke plainly to me. I said to him, 'You possess a cure for consumption?' He said, 'I do not.' I thought his very truthfulness cruel. I admired him, and yet I almost hated him."

"The person you ought to have hated was Dr. Phillips," said Cecilia, with flashing eyes. "I know well who fostered that false hope in your heart. Dr. Phillips has got the most extraordinary idea with regard to my husband. I cannot imagine his motive for spreading the sort of rumors that he has done. They are absolutely untrue."

"Yes," said Lady Sharpe, "Dr. Digby himself denied them." Then she added, laying her plump hand on her young hostess's arm: "I agree with you, my dear."

"What about?" asked Cecilia.

"You say that I ought to hate Dr. Phillips. What if I do?"

Cecilia's eyes grew bright. She made great efforts to suppress some words that rose to her lips.

A voice sounded in her ears. She sprang to her feet.

"We are having a very pleasant time at the other end of the boat, Lady Sharpe," said Phillips. "Mrs. Digby, will not you and Lady Sharpe give us the pleasure of your company?"

Cecilia hesitated, but Lady Sharpe's words were firm.

"We are very happy as we are," she said. "It is refreshing to sit perfectly still and not even to have to look at anything pretty. I am old enough to hate to be asked to admire scenery each moment. Don't worry about us, Dr. Phillips. Go back to your guests like a good man."

Phillips smiled.

"I will confess something," he said. "There are moments in my life when I, too, hate beautiful scenery."

"I never hate it," said Cecilia. "Nothing rests me like a lovely view, but I like best to look at it in silence."

"Then I must accept my mandate," he remarked, with a slightly sarcastic bow. He turned on his heel, and went back to his other guests.

Cecilia and Lady Sharpe sat together for some time. They were old friends now, and had much to talk over in common.

The beautiful day wore on, the gayety and fun increased each moment, and Cecilia began to hope that her husband would soon join them; but at one of the locks a disappointment awaited her. A telegram was handed to her. It was from Digby.

"Cannot join you until you get to Cookham," were the words that it contained.

An exclamation of annoyance rushed to Cecilia's lips. She did not utter it, but a quick, bright color swept over her face, and she crushed the little pink paper in her hand.

A very pretty girl, standing near, came up to her side.

"I hope you have no bad news," she said.

"You would scarcely call it bad news, Miss Clive, but I confess I am disappointed. I hoped my husband would have joined us at this lock, but he has sent word that he cannot be with us for two or three hours longer."

Miss Clive's face grew wistful.

"And that makes you very unhappy?" she queried.

"It disappoints me rather keenly."

"I have heard a great deal about Dr. Digby," continued the girl. "Will you forgive my asking you a question?"

"Certainly. Ask me what you like."

"Have you been married long?"

"Over ten years."

"And you are disappointed, you look pale and miserable, because your husband cannot be with you during the greater part of one day? Surely yours is not a common experience?"

"I cannot answer that question," replied Cecilia. "I should wish for the sake of other wives that it were common."

"Have you heard anything about me lately?"

"Yes, you are shortly going to marry a friend of ours, Herbert Stuart."

"I am, and I love him with all my heart. My friends sometimes laugh at me. They say words like these: 'Wait until you are a prosy old wife, and all your ideas will change. You are now in the ideal stage.' They all say that a period comes when the ideal fades in the light of common day."

"It hasn't proved so in my case," replied Cecilia. "Let us sit here and talk a little. I can give you no better wish than that you may be as happy as I am."

"Mother," said little Nance, suddenly flying up to her mother's side, "won't you come round to where we are all sitting? We are having *such* a jolly time, and Cousin Helen is just going to sing to us."

Cecilia bent down and kissed Nance. Before she could reply another voice sounded in her ears.

"Mrs. Digby," said Phillips, "you are really unkind. For an hour and more this morning you and Lady Sharpe determined to banish yourselves from the rest of the party; now you and Miss Clive are equally cruel."

"But we are enjoying ourselves as we like best," retorted Cecilia. "Miss Clive is my guest, and I am entertaining her. If you find yourself dull, Miss Clive, don't hesitate to say so."

"I have never felt less dull in my life."

"You have your answer, Dr. Phillips. We will join the rest of you presently."

Phillips gave Cecilia a quick, half angry glance. He saw that she was determined to avoid him. He bit his lips, and turned away. Nance looked with eager, loving eyes from her mother to Phillips. She saw that something had put him out, and with quick sympathy ran up to him and slipped her little hand into his.

"I want to hear Cousin Helen sing," she said. "Will you

ask her to begin at once, please? She will do it if you ask her."

"Not a bit sooner for me than for you, little Nancy. Come, we will present our joint entreaties."

He took the child's hand in his own, bestowed upon her a queer, half tender, half remorseful glance, and walked down the little boat.

"Are you dull with me, Nanny," he asked.

"No, what a funny question. I like being with you."

"Shall we sit here for a little? No one seems to want us particularly. At this moment the day is lovely. The loveliness of the day is infecting everyone, and when people are perfectly happy, it is best to leave them alone."

"Yes," said Nance. "I don't think mother and I are perfectly happy, though. We are awfully disappointed about father. Aren't you dreadfully disappointed, Dr. Phillips?"

"Well, Nance, I should prefer to have your father here, of course."

In spite of himself there was a false ring in his voice, which the child detected.

"Why do you speak in that tone?" she asked.

"What tone, my dear?"

"I can't exactly explain the tone to you, but I don't like it. It sounds—queer. Shall we go now and ask Cousin Helen to sing something?"

"In a minute, Nancy. What a very restless little mortal you are. Don't you like sitting still with a friend who cares very much for you?"

"I do like sitting with you, but sometimes I get restless, particularly if I am not tired. I am not a bit tired now. I wish father would come. I know, of course, that he's curing sick people, but it seems hard that he should not have fun like the rest of us. You always have lots of fun, Dr. Phillips. I suppose you don't cure many sick people?"

"I am supposed to cure them, my dear, but, like other doctors, I sometimes fail."

"That's the best of father, he never fails."

"My dear Nanny, some of your father's patients die."

"I know that, but not before father has done them lots of good. You see, it is this way: If God means their bodies to be cured, then father cures them; if not——"

"Go on, Nancy. If not?"

"If not," said Nance, in a solemn voice, "then father does

the other thing. He tells them about the Golden Gates, and then they don't mind."

"The Golden Gates! What in the world do you mean?" asked Phillips, in a puzzled voice.

"Yes; don't you know about them? They stand at the end of life; when you come to the end, the very end, then you reach them, and if you are good you go inside them. Father has often told me about the place at the other side of the Gates, and when sick people are sorry to die father tells them about the other side, and then they don't mind. I shouldn't mind dying a bit."

"Come, my dear," said Phillips suddenly, "you must allow me to say that this kind of talk is very morbid and bad for you. If you were my little girl, I should keep your mind occupied with practical, everyday matters. Come, come, we will join the others, and get your Cousin Helen to sing to us."

Cecilia still stood at a little distance, by Miss Clive's side. They were talking quietly together when the sounds of Helen's voice, pure and sweet as a bird's, floated on their ears:

"Oh, that we two were maying."

Cecilia started. The color filled her cheeks. She gave a quick glance at her companion, then turned her head away.

"You look very tired, Mrs. Digby," said the young girl. "You look as if something pained you. Don't you like that lovely, lovely song?"

"It oppresses me," said Cecilia. "It is too much. It ought not to be sung here."

"Why not? I never heard anything more beautiful."

"It is not right to have it sung like this, in broad daylight, to people who are not prepared."

"But we are both prepared, are we not?" said Miss Clive, with a sudden, very sweet smile. "Listen, do listen!"

The exquisite voice of the singer kept floating and swelling on the summer breeze:

"Oh, that we two sat dreaming
On the sward of some sheep-trimmed down."

A thousand emotions flitted across Miss Clive's face. Cecilia suddenly held out her hand, and clasped that of her young companion.

"We will join the others, if you wish," she said. "I do not think it is right to sing that song to the common herd. For-

give the expression. You know what I mean. The words are holy, and Mrs. Phillips is singing them to a mixed audience. Come, we won't stay by ourselves any longer. I must speak to Mrs. Phillips when the song is finished."

"Oh, that we two lay sleeping,"
sang the minstrel, her voice sweet as evening bells,

"Oh, that we two lay sleeping
In our nest in the churchyard sod,
With our limbs at rest on the quiet earth's breast,
And our souls at home with God,
Our souls at home with God—with God."

Phillips came suddenly up to Cecilia.

"You look very tired," he said, in a voice of sympathy. "Here is a comfortable deck chair, sit here, and let me bring you a cup of tea."

Miss Clive walked forward to speak to an acquaintance; Cecilia sat down without a word of remonstrance. The words kept echoing and echoing in her ears:

"Oh, that we two lay sleeping,"

Why did not Laurence come? She had a queer sensation—forebodings seized her. She knew they were absurd, she knew that even the most sympathetic would laugh at her. Her husband was kept from joining the party by a mission of mercy, and in her foolish, fond heart, she had absolutely begun to fear that some evil had befallen him.

"Oh, that we two lay sleeping."

Phillips brought her a cup of tea; she took it mechanically from his hands.

"Oh, that we two lay sleeping,
In our nest in the churchyard sod."

"What is the matter with you? asked Phillips. "Why do you tremble?"

"I get deadly tired of life, sometimes," she replied.

"You are tired of life on a day like this? Ah, I know! you miss your husband. You are a very devoted wife."

"I love my husband with all my heart and strength," responded Cecilia, speaking in a low voice of suppressed passion.

"I know," said Phillips, in a voice whose sudden sympathy thrilled her. "Digby is the sort of man to inspire adoration

from women. It is quite conceivable even to me that his wife should love him in the way you say."

"I am surprised at your understanding," said Cecilia.

"You do not give me credit even for that?"

"I confess I mistrust you," she said quickly.

"You are painfully frank, Mrs. Digby. You have taken that virtue from your husband."

"My husband is certainly the essence of truth," she replied. She began to sip her tea. The summer breeze swept back her hair, and cooled her hot cheeks. The refrain of Helen's song kept echoing and echoing in her heart.

"And our souls at home,
Our souls at home with God—with God."

Why did not Laurence come?

"Mrs. Digby," said Phillips, who was watching her face intently, "I should like to tell you that your husband and I have had a satisfactory conversation with regard to Sir Henry Marshall. It was a very unpleasant matter, but Digby could scarcely have acted in any other way than he did. I must only trust that Sir Henry will not spread unpleasant rumors with regard to me any further. If he does, I shall have sustained a very great injury, although it was committed unintentionally."

"My husband would, of course, be sorry to injure you in any way," said Cecilia. "He has always appreciated your real kindness to him, but he has also told me, what he has doubtless told you, that, as an individual, he has no sympathy with you."

Phillips winced.

"That does not prevent his acknowledging that I have been a very good friend to him," said Phillips.

"No; he admits that fully."

"Mrs. Digby, you must allow me to say something. Your husband frankly confides to you that he has no sympathy with me. Is it not possible that this is so because he misjudges me? As a young man, I will own that I often irritated him. I liked him as little as he liked me. Perhaps I was jealous. With years one learns to subdue base emotions. With years one learns wisdom."

"You talk in a very different manner to what you did a few nights ago," replied Cecilia.

"Will you make no allowance for the annoyance I naturally

felt that evening? I was much irritated. Surely I had an excuse?"

"Perhaps you had." Mrs. Digby rose from her deck chair. "If I was rude to you that evening, please forget it," she said. "Now, shall we go back to our visitors?"

"One last word. I did you a kindness—you individually—some years ago. I threatened to make that kindness a source of unpleasantness to you the other evening."

"You did," replied Mrs. Digby; "and I told you then what I now repeat—that you can never make me afraid of you. I did very wrong to accept money from you to pay for my husband's brougham. I have not told him, because I am sure he would be distressed and annoyed with me for having accepted money from you for any purpose; but don't suppose for a moment that I should hesitate to tell him everything if you again spoke to me as you did that evening last week."

"My dear lady, I will never speak to you in that tone again. I repented the moment I had left your house. I called myself many hard names. I know that I acted like a brute."

"You certainly did not act like a gentleman."

"Well, well; no one can do more than thoroughly repent. Now, you must listen to me. Your husband possesses a most valuable secret. I frankly own that I am anxious to share it with him. For some extraordinary reason he withholds it from the world. I am anxious to talk that reason over with him—I am most anxious to induce him to change his mind. Digby holds in his hands a cure which he himself has discovered, and which, if rightly used, might largely benefit the human race. It is absolutely wrong of him to keep such a valuable secret to himself. Mrs. Digby, your eyes avoid mine. You know perfectly well that such a secret exists."

"I deny nothing, I affirm nothing," replied Cecilia.

"You are adamant in your tone, but in the expression of your eyes I read your thoughts. I repeat what I said just now—that your husband's motive for keeping this thing dark is an unexplained mystery. He may be overscrupulous; he may fear danger in making experiments. Are not two heads better than one? I ask you, Mrs. Digby, I ask you most earnestly to plead my cause with your husband. Tell him that I will approach his great discovery as reverently as man can; that I will help him to the utmost of my power in every way that I can. I will give money, time, and all that I possess to his aid, and——"

Cecilia raised her head. She began to watch Phillips's face with interest. His words were very earnest. He looked his best at that moment. His dark eyes were gazing straight before him. Suddenly they flashed a look at her. In a twinkling their expression changed. He saw that he had impressed her, and his evil genius looked from his face with a brief flash of triumph, and disappeared.

But Cecilia had seen the look. In an instant the half confidence she was about to give was repressed.

The steam launch was slackening speed. It was approaching one of the locks.

"I do not trust you," said Cecilia. "I do not trust you. Do not ask me why, for it would be absolutely impossible for me to explain. Oh!" she said, with a sudden cry of relief and delight, "there's my husband at last."

Digby was standing by the lock-keeper's side. Cecilia looked up at him, and a smile broke over her face.

CHAPTER V.

A WILD RIDE.

THE gay little steam launch was going quickly back to Richmond at this time. Digby was eagerly welcomed by everyone on board. After the short bustle of greeting was over, he went up to his wife's side.

"I have a treat in store for you," he said; "one that I know you will appreciate. I have arranged that you and I shall drive home through Richmond together. Roberts is bringing the phaeton over."

"That is nice," she answered. "On a beautiful night like this a drive will be delightful. But what are we to do with Nance?"

"Mrs. Phillips will take her home if we ask her. Nance must not be out so late. Ah! there she is, looking at us with her wistful little face. Come along, Nancy; here, spring up on my shoulder. Isn't that a proud elevation? Now look round the world, and tell me what you see."

"Stars coming out in the sky," replied Nance, in her slow voice.

"You romantic little mortal! Well, what else?"

"Happy people all round us. I think the world is quite beautiful to-day. Dad, please let me whisper to you. Did you give Harper the roses?"

"I did, my love. And in especial I gave him the crimson rose with your three kisses in its heart."

"Did he like my roses and my kisses? Did he seem glad?"

"He was scarcely in a condition to be glad. When I saw poor Harper, he was having a desperate fight."

"A fight, father? I thought he was very ill?"

"He was having his last fight, Nance. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. Sometimes, and with some people, there is a hard tussle in that fight."

"Was there for poor Harper?" asked Nance. Tears brimmed up into her eyes as she spoke.

Digby seated himself on the bulwarks that ran round the deck, and took the child on his knee.

"Don't be sad, my little girl," he said. "The fight is well over now, and Harper had the victory in the end. He is the victor now, your red rose lies on his breast. The kisses—I think he took the kisses with him."

"Has he gone inside the Golden Gates at the end of the road?"

"I think he has."

"We are just reaching the pier, Laurence," said his wife. "Nance, darling, do you greatly mind going back to London without father and me?"

Nance looked quickly up, and her sensitive face changed color.

"See how tired father looks," pursued Cecilia. "He wants to drive home from Richmond, and he wants me to go with him, but it isn't good for you to be out in the night air. Do you mind going home with Cousin Helen?"

The child was silent for about half a minute. Her little face turned from white to pink, then she said in that intensely quiet manner which she always put on when she was trying to control her real feelings:

"I don't mind a bit; I like going home with Cousin Helen."

"You are a very brave little girl, and I am proud of you," said Digby, kissing her.

The supper at the "Star and Garter" was all that could be desired. Soon after many of the guests parted from their hosts and hostesses and betook themselves to their own homes.

Phillips and his wife gladly undertook the charge of Nance, and the Digbys found themselves alone. Cecilia was in high spirits now.

"This is really like old times," she said, as she paced the

terrace in front of the hotel with her husband, while they waited for the carriage to come round. "O Laurence, this is delightful! I feel very young to-night."

"My dear," replied her husband, "you are young, and I hope you will long continue to feel all that the word 'youth' implies. Come, here is our trap. Now for a spin through the cool night air. Are the horses all right, Roberts?"

"The new mare is a bit fresh, sir."

Digby went up and patted the horse, a beautiful roan colored animal.

"You will soon be acquainted with my touch, won't you, Stella?" he said. "Ho! quiet now, beauty. Get in, Cecilia, please. We don't want you, Roberts, you can go home by train."

Digby touched the horses lightly with the whip, and he and his wife soon left the "Star and Garter" behind them.

As they were driving down the hill toward London, Digby turned and looked at Cecilia.

"At this rate we shall be home in no time," he said. "Suppose we go for a really long drive. It matters little when we arrive at Hartrick Street, and Stella will be all the better for a good run to take some of the freshness out of her."

"Where shall we go?" asked Cecilia.

"Oh, anywhere. It doesn't matter a bit. I feel in a most festive humor. This delicious air after that close alley raises my spirits to a marvelous pitch. I should not be feeling so gay if I did not know that Harper had also left the noisome and filthy alley, and gone away to a pure air."

Digby turned the horses' heads as he spoke. They drove down a long, shady country road. It was a perfect night, as perfect as the day which had preceded it. Stars glittered in thousands all over the dark blue firmament. Summer lightning played at intervals across the heavens. The breath of the night was cool and balmy as it blew over their faces. Cecilia leant back in the mail phaeton, and gave herself up to absolute enjoyment. Digby was a first-class whip, and she felt no fear whatever when she drove out with him.

"You have always taken a great interest in Harper," she said, after a pause.

"I have—doubtless because in a great measure he reminded me of myself. He was a poor man with no educational advantages, and I have been blessed with the best training of

every sort. Nevertheless, in almost every point we had sympathy. The man in his way was ever a fighter, and so, I think, am I. One after another, dim, dark giants of unbelief, fear, want of faith, assailed him. One after another he laid them low, as—as I hope to lay low giants who fight with me some day.”

Digby sighed as he spoke. Cecilia sat silent. She felt she could not reply to such words of her husband's. A sadness crept over her as she listened to him. She felt that, dearly as she loved him, she but half understood his nature.

After a time she said in a very low voice:

“You speak of shadowy giants who must be conquered. Do they come into all lives?”

“Assuredly. Most assuredly they visit everyone.”

“For instance,” continued Mrs. Digby, “that strange, overpowering sense of nervousness which comes over me now and then, is it purely physical?”

“To a certain extent it is physical, but it is a sort of sensation which, physical in itself, is best overcome by the exercise of the spiritual. The next time that giant assails you, Cecilia, go up to it boldly, run your sword through it, and believe me, it will vanish.”

“What sword?” she asked.

“The sword of faith,” he replied. “The powerful, two-edged sword of faith and prayer.”

Cecilia felt an uprising in her throat. She was silent again for a little; then she said, with uncontrollable impulse:

“I must speak what is in my mind. I am quite sure that as long as I keep close to your side I shall never utterly lose faith in God. You make dishonor impossible to me. You make evil things hateful to me. You make good things adorable. I see good through your eyes, and it looks very fair; I see evil through your eyes, and it looks black and loathsome. I see—Laurence, are we not going very fast? Are you losing control of the horses?”

“No,” replied Digby, “the horses are all right. They are fresh, I admit, but I can pull them in at any moment. I hope you had a happy day, Cecilia. It was very unlucky, my being obliged to absent myself. How did Phillips get on? Do you think he has quite got over that unpleasant affair connected with Sir Henry Marshall?”

“He seems to have got over it. He spoke kindly to me.

I do not think he ever spoke more kindly—not that I trust him,” added Mrs. Digby suddenly.

Digby turned round, and gave her a sharp glance.

“You share my sentiments,” he said, after a pause. “I often cry shame to myself for not being a better friend to that man. He has been persistently kind to me. He has helped me more substantially than most men would help their brothers. I will not for a moment admit that I should not have secured many patients without his aid, but I must at the same time honestly confess that I should not have got a practice so quickly had he not spoken of me far and near. Knowing the man’s character, I cannot understand why he has done all this. In his heart he is not my friend, and—I am going to say something uncharitable—he is not even a generous minded man. Why has he helped me?”

“I know,” said Cecilia suddenly.

“You know?” retorted Digby. “My dear, explain yourself.”

“He has fully revealed his motive to me. You remember that old secret of yours, Laurence?”

“That old secret?” replied Digby. “I never kept a secret in my life. What do you mean?”

“You may not call it a secret. Long ago, before we were married, you made a discovery with regard to consumption. Don’t you remember telling me of it the day after Nance was so ill? I, at least, have never forgotten what you said that evening.”

“Whoa, Stella! not so quick,” said Digby. He tightened his hold of the reins, and compelled the horses to go at a more moderate speed.

“Cecilia,” he continued, a slight severity coming into his voice, “you did not, I hope, repeat what I said on that night at any time to Phillips.”

“Never. It is unjust of you even to ask me the question.”

“Forgive me, my darling. I might have known that you were as true as steel. So Phillips scents possible fame in the shape of my immature discovery. Ha, ha! That is his motive. Now there is another point: the man has constantly hinted to me his firm belief that I hold in my hands the cure for the most terrible and fell disease in existence. I have never spoken of my partial discovery to a human being but yourself. You have never breathed it to mortal. How has the idea got into his brain?”

"I cannot tell you, Laurence. It is certainly there."

"And what is more," continued Digby, "it has been there for a long time. He sent Lady Sharpe to me on its quest. How has the knowledge possibly got to him?"

"I do not know."

"He would be dishonorable enough to read my papers, but none have ever got into his hands. I must own that this puzzles me and makes me uneasy. Phillips is a man who would do me a mischief if he could."

"Yes, I agree with you. As I said just now, I don't trust him. He told me emphatically to-day that he knew you had made an important discovery. He said that it was wrong of you not to use it. He is anxious to talk the matter over fully with you. He says that he will approach your discovery in a spirit of reverence; that he will assist you with money, with time—in short, that he will more or less give up his life to this thing."

"He is utterly mistaken if he thinks I could ever work it with him," said Digby. "Whoa, whoa, Stella! you are going too much ahead again. There, that is better. Phillips and I are as the poles apart in all things, Cecilia. Even if there was anything to confide, I should never give my confidence to a man like James Phillips."

"I told him so, Laurence; I told him as much in my own words. Still, the man has a queer—I might almost call it a cruel—persistence about the matter."

"In this case, my love, that persistence will never meet with its reward. Cecilia, you look very pale and tired."

"I am a little tired, but I am also happy. I am enjoying my drive immensely. Laurence, may I venture to ask you a question?"

"May you venture? Of course."

"Why have you never perfected your discovery?"

"For a thousand reasons, my dear, which I can scarcely explain to you."

"Have you ceased to believe in it?"

"By no means—I do fully believe in it. I think it contains the germs of a very great idea. I believe that a day will come when a thought like mine will visit some one man who will have brains, time, and money to bring it to perfection."

"Why should not you be the man?"

"I have neither got the time nor the money."

"The thought was given to you," persisted Cecilia; "you ought to make the time."

"If I live long enough I may. My first duty at present is to provide for your future and for Nance's. Believe me, Cecilia, I am not losing precious moments. To discover a cure for such a terrible disease as consumption a man must be armed on all points. He cannot possibly acquire too much knowledge. You know I have made consumption my speciality, and each day I get more and more into its dark and fearful secrets. I take copious notes of every case that comes under my notice. I am, to a certain extent, successful in my treatment—I mean that I have in many cases arrested the complaint, although no cure has yet absolutely been discovered for it. You remember that I sent Dorothy Sharpe to the Engadine, and you know how very successful my idea proved in her case. Since then I have sent several consumptive patients to high and rarefied air. This is a comparatively new treatment, and it interests me much. High air brings each portion of the lungs into full exercise, and in some cases absolutely arrests the disease, the patches of tubercle being simply dried up. Of course, there is the possibility of these tubercles becoming active once more, but this state of things does not necessarily follow. I am much pleased with the new treatment, and in almost every case of consumption would advocate its adoption. What is the matter, Cecilia? How you fidget!"

They were going down hill at a great pace, and Digby noticed that his wife moved restlessly as if she was not quite easy in her mind.

"There is nothing to be anxious about," he continued. "Are you afraid of the new mare? She is rather nervous, but you have nothing whatever to fear."

"Is there really no danger?" asked Cecilia. She looked into her husband's face with alarm. "The mare starts dreadfully. Are the horses likely to become unmanageable?"

Digby gave her a quick, reassuring smile.

"I don't apprehend the least danger, my love," he said. "I am, as you know, a fairly good whip; the horses will have plenty to take it out of them before we get near town."

Cecilia did not ask any more, she seemed satisfied. Her nervous manner vanished; she leaned back in her seat, and gazed into a rapidly darkening night. It was true that Digby was a capital whip, and his words completely reassured her.

The darkness of the summer night was presently illumined

by a rising moon of great loveliness. The road lay in front of them like a winding white ribbon. Neither man nor any other living creature was in sight. Cecilia forgot the present in the thoughts that thronged her brain. A cold breeze came up and gave her a passing chill. She wrapped her crimson cloak tighter around her shoulders; her face was very pale, and the moonbeams lit up her bright hair.

Digby glanced round at his wife, and gave a quick sigh of satisfaction. Cecilia had doubtless many faults, but he felt at this moment that she was a very perfect and loveable woman. He had never regretted his rather hasty marriage. His wife had those qualities which can ensure unflagging interest. She was quick, bright, impulsive. Her heart was full of the deepest and tenderest affection. She was very true, her moral courage seldom failed her. When she did wrong, hers was a quick and intense repentance.

As years went by, Cecilia's character had altered, had strengthened and improved. She had become practical—she had developed tact, she was far less under the influence of every passing emotion than of old. In every way she was an excellent and faithful wife, and a deeply affectionate mother.

Digby felt proud of her. He said to himself, as he sat now by her side, that no woman could be dearer to him than this one whom he had truly married in haste.

"I am proud of Cecilia to-night," he said under his breath. "Her nervous system is in much better order than of old. She has learnt quickly how to control emotion. She was frightened a moment ago, now how calmly she sits—she trusts to my word. By Jove, though! I hope the new mare will not turn hasty. How she starts at every shadow; I trust—Yes, my love, what is it?"

"I don't know this road, Laurence. We ought to be at Putney by this time, ought we not?"

"All in good time, Cecilia. Is not our spin through the air jolly?"

"Yes, delicious. What a splendid whip you are! but doesn't the trap sway a good bit?"

"Yes; but the springs are all right. We shall soon be on level ground, and then this swinging motion will cease. I hope you are not cold, Cecil?"

"Not a bit. My cloak is very warm. I am enjoying my drive immensely. A queer kind of feeling comes over me as

I sit here by your side. I want our ride to go on forever. I feel with Browning's lover:

“What if we still ride on, we two,
With life forever old yet new.

“How you start, Laurence. What is the matter?”

“Nothing, my love. The horses are a little fresh, no doubt, but they will soon tire themselves out and jog home all too quietly by and by. Oh, this is better. You don't feel the swaying of the carriage now, do you?”

“Not in the least, now that we are on level ground. I feel almost sleepy; I shall lean back and shut my eyes. Perhaps I shall go to sleep.”

“Do, if you are tired. I will wake you when we get near home.”

The mail phaeton in which they were driving had deep cushions and luxurious springs. Cecilia lay back, feeling lazy and soothed. She closed her eyes—she was really very tired—she dropped into a doze, and began to dream.

In her dream she thought that she and her husband were flying through space on the back of a dragon. They were sitting close together, and Digby's arm was round her waist. He was guiding the monster, who obeyed his slightest touch. Cecilia clasped in her arms a parcel. It contained those papers that gave full particulars with regard to her husband's half gained discovery. Cecilia held the parcel close to her heart, which beat with loud throbs against it, but she held the packet firmly, although it hurt her with its weight and with the tightness of the pressure with which she kept it against her side.

Phillips was pursuing the pair on another dragon, from whose mouth issued fire. Cecilia felt the hot flame, and she knew that the pursuing dragon and the man whom she mistrusted so deeply gained and gained on them. His hand at last touched her shoulder, his other hand was stretched out to wrench Digby's secret from her arms. She uttered a sharp cry, and awoke. She sat upright in her seat, white and trembling. Her dream had vanished, but the world of reality looked queer. What was the matter? Why were they going at such reckless speed? Why did the phaeton jolt and bump and shiver? Digby was sitting bolt upright, well forward in his seat. He was holding the reins very high and tight. His eyes, stern in expression, looked straight before him.

"What is the matter?" asked Cecilia, a sharp note of alarm in her voice. "Are the horses running away?"

"I hope not," replied Digby, "but they are excited."

"Are you anxious about them?"

"Yes, rather. There is a train signaled to go over that bridge; I want to get past it before the train arrives. Don't speak. Sit quiet. Try not to be afraid."

Cecilia murmured something. Her voice choked and failed her. The old terror of fainting came like a grim phantom before her vision. In a happy moment she remembered the words that her husband had said to her a short hour ago: "Remember that the bogie you dread is simply air. Run a sword through it, and it will vanish." Poor Cecilia! Quick, like a flash, rose her broken, faltering prayer to the heavens:

"Good Lord, deliver me! Give me strength not to show cowardice in this danger!"

The answer, in the removal of the terror, came at once. She opened her eyes, and looked at her husband. He was standing up in the trap urging the horses to greater speed. They reached the bridge almost directly. Digby hoped that they would get to the other side before the train arrived; but he had made a miscalculation. Already the rumble and roar of the approaching monster reached his ears, and the next instant the great train thundered by, shaking the ground and causing a thousand reverberations as it dashed into space.

The horses, already very nervous, pulled up short, and backed on to the phaeton. Digby caught his whip, and used it with such good effect that the horses again rushed forward for a few steps.

"Hold on!" he shouted to his wife. "I think the worst is over."

"Look at the new mare!" she exclaimed in terror. "See how she is pulling—how excited she is; you will never be able to control her."

Digby could not reply. All his efforts were concentrated in endeavoring to keep the horses within bounds. The mare was frightfully excited, and the older horse began to share her agitation. The rumble of another train was heard approaching. This was enough. The pair were off like the wind.

"Give me a hand with the brutes, Cecilia," said her husband. "Help me to hold the reins; I cannot manage them alone."

His words gave her new courage. It was inspiring to feel

that she could help him. She sprang to her feet, and, taking the reins, began pulling with all her might and main.

"I think we can guide the horses until we get to that hill in the distance," said Digby, "then the pull up will stop them."

The perspiration stood on his face. He made almost herculean exertions. As Cecilia held the reins by his side she felt she had slain the bogie of terror once and forever.

This knowledge gave her fresh courage; the mad race grew faster and faster, but she ceased to be terrified. The more she exercised self-control the calmer she grew.

"Whatever happens you must not jump out," said Digby, his words coming in jerks, for the exertions he was making were depriving him of breath. "Whatever happens, stick to your seat, and hold on to the reins."

They were now approaching a narrow, rustic bridge. The carriage was swaying fearfully; as they reached the bridge it gave such a tremendous lurch that the pole was snapped in two. The horses, already mad with terror and excitement, instantly lost even the instinct of self-preservation. They rushed wildly to one side of the road, one of the wheels bumped against a projecting stone in the wall of the bridge. The jerk was terrible, and Cecilia, unable any longer to keep her seat, was hurled out of the trap. She lay stunned for a moment; then, dazed, trembling, and shaking in every limb, struggled to her feet.

For a moment she remembered nothing. Her only sensation was one of relief. Her feet rested once again on the solid earth. That horrible race with death and danger was at an end. She was shaken, of course, but, as far as she could tell, she had sustained no serious injury.

Where was her husband? She looked round for him. Had he, too, been thrown from the trap? Where was he? Where were the maddened horses and the phaeton?

Cecilia rubbed her dazed eyes, and looked up and down the road in increasing agitation.

A couple of cushions had been flung out of the trap, they lay almost at her feet, her husband's whip also was tossed to the other side of the road. Digby himself, however, was nowhere in sight. The horses and trap could not be seen.

Cecilia began to call her husband's name. She shouted it louder and louder. There was no answer. She ran along the road, looking eagerly to right and left. A thousand possibil-

ities flitted through her brain. Surely if she had escaped unhurt, Laurence, who was so much wiser, and cleverer, and more athletic, must also have done so. It was ridiculous for her even to fancy that anything had happened to him. As she had escaped, surely his safety went without saying. Cecilia had never known Digby's nerve to desert him. He was athletic, too; very quick and prompt in his movements.

"Laurence!" she said, calling his name again, "Laurence!"

There was no answer. There was no one in sight. Cecilia began to wonder if Digby could have retained his seat when she was hurled out of the trap. She thought it possible that he was still rushing through the air in that mad race. Surely this must be the case, otherwise he would come to her at once, alarmed and in terror with regard to her safety.

She began to run along the road, looking eagerly to right and left. Now and then she called her husband's name, but the thought that he was still with the horses grew stronger and stronger, for the more she reflected over the matter the more convinced she became that he would come to her at once if he could, and that her safety would be his first consideration.

The moonlight was now very bright, and she could see a good way ahead of her. After the noise, and the rush, and the mad commotion, all nature seemed to have fallen asleep. Nothing living appeared to be in sight. The phaeton had vanished, the horses had disappeared, Laurence was no longer by her side. The occurrence of the past hour seemed to have passed like an ugly dream of the night. Only one thing remained. Cecilia found herself alone on a strange road, running feebly and crying helplessly. Her white dress, so fresh when she had put it on in the morning, was now draggled and dusty. Her cloak had been torn from her when she was flung from the trap. She did not feel fatigued or cold. She was only conscious of an ever increasing terror.

A voice sounded in her ears. She stood still as if the sound had given her an electric shock.

"There's a man in the ditch over yonder."

A rough looking countryman came up to her. He pointed with his hand backward along the road.

"Be yer a runnin' away fro' he?" he asked. "The man's mortal bad, I'm feared."

"Where is he?" asked Cecilia. "He must be my husband. Take me to him."

"He's flung across a ditch over there. I'm a gwine for help for he. He don't speak; had a bad fall most like. Be yours the horses I heard thundering up the hill just now?"

"Yes, yes," said Cecilia. "We were in a mail phaeton, and it got smashed. The pole was broken and I was flung out. I hoped my husband might have been still with the horses. Where is he? Take me to him. Let us go to him without a moment's delay."

"Yer was runnin' away fro' he. Come back, I'll take you. He's lying a many stones' throw fro' here. Were the trap a high un?"

"Yes, very high—a mail phaeton; I was flung out. When I rose to my feet I saw neither horses nor trap; I hoped my husband might be still with them. Let us run back at once. Where did you say he was lying. I can see nothing in the road nor in the ditch, and my head begins to swim."

Cecilia rushed down the road, the sturdy countryman trotted by her side. At last he drew up, and pointed with his hand.

"There's the man," he said. "I'll go for help to Farmer Nettle's if yer like."

"Wait a moment, you may be required here."

Cecilia ran across the road and fell on her knees before the prostrate figure. Digby lay full length along the ditch, without any movement.

"Laurence!" she cried, "Laurence!" His hat had been knocked off his head. His face was deadly white; there was a bluish gray tint over it; his eyes were closed.

The ditch was a very wet one, and Cecilia felt the water soaking into her thin white dress. She pressed her hand on the sopping grass and on the tangle of weeds, and then laid it, cool and wet, on her husband's brow.

"Laurence," she said again, "I am here. Cecilia is here. Open your eyes."

He obeyed her as if her touch had magic in it.

"Well, Cecil," he said, speaking with pauses, "we had—a narrow—shave." He smiled at her, then his face grew whiter.

"You are hurt!" she exclaimed in terror.

"A little—perhaps," he continued. "I must sell—that mare—Stella—she played us—a—nasty prank." He stopped

speaking again as if his breath hurt him, then, making a great effort, continued in his usual manner:

"You have escaped unhurt—what a blessing."

"Yes, I am as well as possible. How did you get into this ditch?"

"Was shot into it, I expect—can't say that I remember."

"Have you been in a faint? Your eyes were shut when I found you."

"Perhaps I did faint, perhaps I was stunned."

"You are not much hurt?"

"I don't know."

"Are you in pain?"

"A little in the nape of the neck."

"Why do you lie like that without moving? You are lying in a wet ditch. There is a man here, a countryman; he looks strong, he will help you to get up."

"Cecilia, will you do something for me?"

"Need you ask?"

"This is a simple thing, dearest, and yet much depends on it. Pinch my arm."

"Why?" she inquired.

A look on his face caused the words to die on her lips. She pinched his arm with all her strength.

"Do I hurt you?" she asked.

"No, I wish you did. Pinch harder."

"Your coat is thick, Laurence. My hands are cold."

"Pinch my hand, then, or my leg. Do it hard. Ah! thank you, Cecilia, you have done your best."

"What do you mean? Why are you looking at me with such a queer expression?"

"Don't be frightened, Cecil. I have scarcely any pain, but I can't get up or move. It would be better to get a doctor here if anyone—happens to live within call—that man—might run for one. If—a doctor can't be—had—tell him to—bring a plank along—and to ask for further assistance. I—must—be moved—to the nearest—house—I can't—return—to London."

With all his efforts to speak as usual, Digby's words came out with odd pauses.

CHAPTER VI.

WAITING BY THE GOLDEN GATES.

YEARS had produced little effect on Mrs. Lancaster. She had experienced few of the shocks which assail warmer and more impulsive natures. On this particular afternoon, in the beginning of a very hot July, she stood in her drawing room, looking exactly as she had done ten years ago. Not a day older, not a whit different in any way. An excited group were standing round her. They were talking and exclaiming. One of them was pacing up and down before the windows; another was sitting by the table, her hat thrown off, her face flushed, tears streaming down her cheeks.

Mrs. Lancaster had a way of making her voice heard above any babel of ordinary sounds. It rose now, shrill, hard, and piercing.

"I might have known it," she said; "I might have known that Cecilia's luck would not last long. She was a most troublesome girl, and I have not the least doubt that she will be equally unmanageable as a widow. Dear, dear, dear! Why am I afflicted with a niece of this kind?"

"Mamma," said Millie Lancaster, stamping her foot, "your words are perfectly heartless! In such a time as this who could think of poor Cecilia in anything but the kindest way?"

"Who can think of her at all?" exclaimed Helen Phillips. "Who can think of anyone in all the world but that poor, dear Dr. Digby? Oh! it is dreadful. I do not think I have ever felt so shocked in all my life. When the news reached me I fainted—James was quite terrified about me, and now—now—oh, mamma, how can you speak as you do?"

"It is all very fine, my dear," said Mrs. Lancaster. "I am just as kind-hearted as any one of you. I was extremely fond of Laurence Digby—I am extremely fond of him. I will frankly admit that I always thought him twenty times too good for Cecilia. I was delighted, of course, that she should have secured such an amiable and excellent husband. It took a great load off my mind, I can tell you, and, under his influence, I am quite willing to admit that she became vastly improved. I would do anything in the wide world to save the life of that poor, dear man, but, as that is impossible, you must forgive me, my dears, for not being so carried

away by mere pity as you are. I see the future plainly. Laurence Digby will die to-morrow, the next day, next week—anyhow, if the doctors are right, very soon. Cecilia will be a widow. I have not the smallest doubt that her means will be extremely limited. Laurence was so unworldly that he has probably saved nothing out of his income, and she and her child will be thrown on the world. I foresee, I plainly foresee, that Cecilia will be a most troublesome widow. I am very sorry for her, of course, but I must be frank.”

“There is a time for expressing frankness,” said George Lancaster, pausing in his walk up and down before the bay window. “I do not think we will pursue this discussion. How did you hear about the accident, Helen?”

“A telegram came from Cecilia this morning,” said Helen. “Dr. Digby was moved to the farmhouse near by, and James and two other doctors went down by the first train this morning to see him. I waited until James came back before I came over to tell you.”

“My dear,” said Mrs. Lancaster, “I dare say that you have exaggerated your husband’s report. It seems almost incredible to me that a strong man like Dr. Digby should be killed, or at least mortally injured, by a mere fall from his trap.”

“The trap was a high one, mamma, and James says that he must have got his foot entangled in the reins, or something of that sort—at any rate, the jar must have been frightful, and he was thrown a good distance.”

“Cecilia, of course, managed to escape unhurt,” pursued Mrs. Lancaster.

“Yes, it is a blessing she did, though James says it is also a perfect marvel. The trap was literally broken to bits, and the horses were so injured that when they were caught they had both to be shot at once. Oh, dear, dear! I can scarcely realize that anything so dreadful could have happened while we were safe and sound in our beds. Poor Cecilia! Poor, dear Dr. Digby! Why did they not come back with us by train?”

“Yes, my dear, that is what is always said when the mischief is done. I have myself spoken to Laurence on the subject of his horses. He was not half careful enough. A doctor should never drive in anything but a brougham. I consider it absolutely improper for a medical man to rush over the country in one of those mail phaetons.”

“He never drove it in town, mamma.”

"Well, my dear, he ought not to have driven it in the country; and what was it I heard about that mare? Oh, yes, I remember now. It belonged to young Frank Johnson. Everyone knows the kind of horses Frank keeps."

"Roberts, the groom, says that he never much liked the mare, but she was not at all vicious," said Helen. "Well, I suppose I had better go home now."

She rose from her chair as she spoke.

"Yes, my love," said her mother, going up and kissing her. "Be sure that you let us know if we can do anything, and if there is any change for the better. It is quite a common thing, remember, for a man's case to be declared hopeless, and yet for him to recover. You are the wife of a doctor, Helen, but I do not mind telling you that doctors are not infallible."

"I wish, mamma, that there was the least chance of your words proving true. James says that he does not think there is the shadow of hope; he is sure that Dr. Digby sustained fracture of the spine when he fell. He is completely paralyzed, and James considers that it is merely a question of days."

"Well, well," said Mrs. Lancaster, rubbing her hands, "it really is a most terrible calamity. The ways of Providence are mysterious. Such a good, useful man; now, if it had been Cecilia——"

"Mamma, do try and have a kindly feeling toward poor Cecilia now."

"Oh, yes, my dear. I will do everything in my power for her when she needs my help. Are you going to her, Helen? I hope not. She will most probably be in a dreadful state of excitement, and you are really not strong enough to stand it. I suppose one or two nurses have been sent down to that farm?"

"No, Cecilia is doing everything herself, and she is not the least excited. James says he never saw her calmer."

"I am glad of that. That good, excellent man, her husband, may have taught her some common sense. I hope it will last after he is removed. I would go to her myself if she needed me."

"No, mamma, she will not need you. James is going down again this evening, and I may go with him; I am not sure."

"I wouldn't, if I were you, Helen; but if you *absolutely*

make up your mind to do so, you can send the child over here."

"They have sent for Nance, mamma. James is going to take her down to-night."

"How wrong! I call it absolutely wicked to take a young child into scenes of that sort. And a delicate, consumptive child, too! I am sure that is not poor Laurence Digby's doing."

"Yes, mamma, he has asked for her several times."

"Have you told the poor little thing of the accident?"

"We have told her something. She takes the news quietly. I never saw a sweeter little creature."

"She doesn't realize it, poor little thing," said Mrs. Lancaster, "it isn't likely. Well, Helen, take care of yourself, and, if you think anything of your mother's advice, stay in town and send a sensible, capable nurse down to Cecilia Digby. If you were still under my charge, I should forbid you to go to that farm, but, of course, I have no control over Dr. Phillips's wife. What is that you are saying, Millie? No, my dear, you are not to go to Cecilia Digby."

"I am going down," said George. "I may be of no use whatever, but I shall take the next train down. I shall probably not be back to-night."

"You will be terribly in the way, George, but if you will insist in putting yourself into a false position——"

"Yes, mother, I shall go down. Come along, Nell, I can see you home first."

The brother and sister left the room, and Mrs. Lancaster scolded poor little Millie for several minutes and made herself very cross generally.

Mrs. Lancaster did not look a day older, and apparently the years had brought no change; but that sure thing had happened to her that comes to all natures—she had not stood still. It is impossible to stand still for a single instant in life. We must go down hill or we must go up. Mrs. Lancaster had become a little harder and a little more uncharitable as the years went by. The spirit of loving kindness grew fainter and fainter in her breast. The spirit of hardness and worldliness strengthened day by day within her. Like all other human beings, she had been made in the Divine likeness, but that likeness was gradually yet surely fading from her nature. She was not considered a bad woman, and she thought extremely well of herself, but had Christ lived on earth in Mrs.

Lancaster's time He would have pronounced one of His hardest sentences against her.

George and Helen went straight back to Hartrick Street. Phillips was there, in a state of great excitement. He was making arrangements to bring Sir Charles Mackenzie, the great specialist for spine injuries, down to see Digby that evening. All was confusion and movement. Helen felt a certain relief in rushing about and doing things. * She went herself to superintend the packing of a basket with every conceivable delicacy in it for Digby's use. Fruit, ices, jellies, champagne, were all put into this basket. She bought the rarest flowers to place in the top, and her tears fell as she packed the various things, which, after all, might soothe, but were powerless to give the sick man the slightest relief.

The nearest railway station to the scene of the accident was Hampton Wick. Phillips, taking little Nance with him, and accompanied by Sir Charles Mackenzie and another surgeon, arrived there between six and seven that evening, and drove over at once to the Nettles' farm. The farm was nearly two miles from the station. It was a poor sort of place; the house rambling and very old-fashioned; the rooms had low ceilings and small windows.

When the doctors drove up to the farmhouse door Cecilia was standing on the steps. Her face had undergone a curious change, which so completely altered its expression that Nance, when she sprang from Phillips's arms to her mother's, noticed it, and began softly to stroke her cheeks.

"What are you doing that for, Nance?" she asked.

"I want your face to alter, mother. I don't like that new, funny face you have on a bit."

Cecilia pressed the child close to her heart, and went into the house with her.

"My darling," she said, "I may well have a new and altered face; everything has changed with me since you saw me last. I can't cry, and I don't know that I suffer particularly, but I feel as if my heart was dead."

"Sit down, mother," said Nance, in her comforting way, "and let me cuddle up into your arms. How cold you are, mother, and I am nice and warm. Feel me, I'm all glowing. Perhaps your heart won't stop dead long when I am close to you. I love you so very, very much, mother."

"Ah, my sweet, I forgot about you when I said all the world had changed. Give me one big kiss, Nance, and

then—your supper is waiting for you, darling, you must eat it.”

“I’m not a bit hungry. I want to go to father. Mother, is it true that father has done curing people? Cousin Helen said so to-day, but I didn’t believe her.”

“I am afraid it is true, Nance, but I cannot stay to talk to you about it now. Do you mind staying here alone for a little, while you eat your supper?”

“No, mother, I don’t mind a bit.”

Cecilia left the room, closing the door behind her, and Nance stood in the center of the ugly farmhouse parlor, swinging her hat on her arm.

Her little pale face wore a puzzled and pathetic expression. She was not exactly unhappy, but her supper seemed distasteful; she turned from the bowl of hot bread and milk, and, walking to the lattice window, pressed her face against it, and looked out.

The queer, changed look on her mother’s face kept flashing again and again before her eyes. Why had the world suddenly changed to her bright, pretty, laughing mother? And why would her father never again cure people?

Unpleasant, suspicious whispers had been round the little girl all day; wherever she went people looked at her queerly. When she entered a room the conversation was abruptly changed; she was petted rather more than usual. Nance did not like to be petted by strangers, and people said, “Poor child! poor little dear!” whenever she turned her back.

Henny-Penny had spent almost the whole day crying. She would not tell Nance what she cried about, and when the child had submitted to several fervent but damp embraces, she left her nurse in some displeasure.

“You ought to control yourself, Henny-Penny,” she said. “Father likes people to control themselves. He says it is not at all brave to cry, even if you do feel sorry.”

Nance had been told that her father was suffering from a very bad fall from the trap, but this news, uttered many times and in many shapes, failed to seriously alarm her. She had no past experience with regard to falls to make her frightened. She was very glad indeed when Phillips told her that he was going to take her to her father and mother, and she felt absolutely certain that when she saw her mother the queer cloud which was hanging over everything would pass away.

Well, she had seen her, but the cloud had not passed away; on the contrary, it seemed to grow blacker.

Nance wondered what it could mean. She had an idea deep down in her little soul that doctors—particularly very clever ones like her father—were always able to cure themselves. They knew just the right medicines to use and the right means to employ, and if they did happen to be ill or hurt they were quite certain to be as well as ever before long.

Nance had been hungry before she entered the farmhouse, but now she could not touch her nice bowl of bread and milk. She stood by the lattice window, which was partly open, and looked out. There were roses twining all round the window, and some of them peeped in, and, swayed by the sweet evening breezes, nodded to Nance as she stood gazing with her wistful eyes into their hearts.

They reminded her of the roses she had sent to Harper, and in especial, of the great crimson rose she had kissed. Her father had said that Harper liked that rose, that he had taken the kisses into heaven with him.

A sudden sound of voices fell on the child's ears. Three men came and stood at a little distance from the open window.

Nance hid herself behind the roses and looked at them. They were the three doctors who had traveled down with her to Hampton Wick. They began to talk to one another.

"It's all up with him, then, poor fellow," said the surgeon who had accompanied Sir Charles Mackenzie to the farm.

"'Poor fellow'—that must mean father," said Nance. She bent forward, her heart beating, her eyes growing round and dilated. She did not mind whether she was a little eaves-dropper or not.

"I spoke to him this morning," said Phillips, "but he could not reply without considerable difficulty, and could give no definite account of the accident."

"From the nature of the injury," remarked Sir Charles Mackenzie, "he probably came with great force on the back of his neck. You say the trap was a high one? I have known a man thrown from a trap of that sort who absolutely turned a somersault in the air before he reached the ground. How did his wife find him? Was he unconscious?"

"He was lying in a wet ditch," said Phillips. "She said he seemed stunned at first, but he soon spoke to her, and told her that he was unable to move. He did not complain of much pain, but there was numbness of the limbs and uneasiness about

the nape of the neck. He was perfectly collected, however, and gave all directions about his removal to this farm. They sent first of all for the local doctor, but he was not at home, so they brought him here on a plank."

"I have examined him most carefully," said Sir Charles. "There is evidently injury to the spinal cord, though I can find no fracture of the spinal column. It is evidently one of those cases where there has been a partial dislocation with a quick return of the vertebræ."

"And there is absolutely no chance of a recovery?" asked Phillips.

"The cord has been much crushed and injured. Recovery in such cases always depends on the amount of injury to the spinal cord. In this case it is high up, from the paralysis which exists below the neck. The worst sign of the case is the state of the patient's respiration. He does not breathe from the throat at all."

Nance's little white face was pressed closer and closer to the sheltering rose tree. The doctors' words were Greek to her, but their looks, their gestures, their solemnity, filled her with a sick apprehension. What *did* they mean by the spinal cord? What *was* paralysis? Surely her father was not the one spoken of when they said "he has no chance of recovery"? The doctors spoke in very strange language, but their words held her motionless with a horrible fascination.

The three men paced up and down, up and down. They seemed to know that Nance was listening, they kept so close to the rose tree.

A sound of wheels was heard in the distance. It was the hired trap coming to take Sir Charles Mackenzie and Mr. Crichton back to London.

"I can do no more good," said Sir Charles, turning to Phillips; "he may live a day or two, not more. Yes, he will retain his intelligence to the last. An operation did you say? An operation in his case would not be of the slightest avail. There is no displacement. The fact of paralysis being so complete from the first shows that the——"

The last words fell faintly on Nance's ears. The doctors were walking toward the front of the house, where the trap stood.

"Shows the—shows what?" she said to herself, clasping her hands. "Oh, I'm glad there's not going to be an operation. Operations hurt people. Henny-Penny has told me about

them; they are cruel. I am glad father is not going to be hurt. I'll go to him now. I wonder where he is. What very queer words the doctors spoke. Who is the person who is not going to recover? I don't believe for moment that it's father."

Still holding her hat on her arm, Nance opened the sitting room door, and went into the passage.

The house was strange to her, and there was no one about to tell her the way. She walked through an empty kitchen with rafters across the ceiling. In the passage beyond the kitchen was an oak door which was shut, and just at the other side of the door were some narrow, steep stairs leading up into the roof of the old farmhouse.

Nance began to climb the stairs, looking up as she did so.

A blowsy, fat farm maid came clattering down.

"Hush," said Nance, "you oughtn't to make so much noise."

"Oh, lawk-a-daisy," said the maid, falling back in astonishment, "who's this little maid?"

"I'm Nance Digby," said the child, in her gentle voice. "Can you tell me in which room my father is?"

"In that room, missy," pointing to the oak door. "But maybe you oughtn't to go in. Shall I call my missus to you?"

"No, thank you; I want to speak to father. Of course I may go in."

"But missy——"

Nance did not hear. She had turned back, stepped lightly down the stairs, and, lifting the ponderous latch of the old door, found herself in a room nearly as large as the kitchen, which had been extemporized into a bedroom for the time being.

A rude bed had been erected in the middle of the room, and the first thing Nance saw when she entered was the familiar face of her father looking at her from the bed.

Her little heart gave a bound of childish delight. He was not so very ill, then. He looked pretty much as usual. A little pale and tired, perhaps, but, of course, he would look like that after his bad fall. What a fuss those silly doctors had made, and what a lot of rubbish they had spoken!

Nance, in her sudden delight at finding the dreadful cloud of apprehension lifted from her mind, came with little bounds and skips across the room. She sprang lightly on the bed, and began rapturously to kiss his lips and forehead.

"Dear little Nance!" said Digby.

His voice was weak, and the words came slowly.

The child started back when he spoke to her, and gazed at him earnestly. The fears which she had thought banished forever began to come to her, but she fought against them.

"I'm so glad I'm with you, father," she said, nestling down comfortably by his side. I have been longing to be with you all day, ever since I heard you had a bad fall. It was Roberts, the groom, told me first. He said, 'Drat that Stella! I never could abide her, and now she's gone and done for the doctor!' He said she was '*that* flighty.' "

"Hush, Nance, never mind what Roberts said."

"I don't mind what anybody says now I'm with you. And poor Stella didn't do for you, because you don't look at all bad. Just a little white, perhaps, but that's because you had a bad fall. Do you like to have me like this, lying close to you, father?"

"Very much indeed, my love."

"It's awfully snug, I think." Nance snuggled up a little closer to Digby.

"Father," she said, after a pause, "I heard the doctors talking about you."

"Ah! where were you, my love?"

"I was in the ugly little parlor downstairs, with a bowl of bread and milk. I didn't want the bread and milk, and the window of the parlor was open, and there were a lot of roses in full flower at the other side of the window, and some of them had pushed their way into the room. I stood at the other side of the roses, and Dr. Phillips, and Sir Charles Mackenzie, and Mr. Crichton came and walked about on the gravel outside, and they talked about you."

"You listened to what they said? That was wrong, Nance," said Digby, with a slow, half comical smile.

"I couldn't help it—their talk interested me awfully; it was all about you."

"That goes without saying, Nance. They came down here to see me."

"They called you a poor fellow," said Nance; "and they said that your recovery depended on the amount of the injury; and they said it was a bad sign to have parasisis below the neck, and that you turned a somersault when you fell. Father, what's the matter? You look as if you were going to laugh, and yet you didn't want to laugh. Have I frightened you with the doctors' words? Perhaps I shouldn't have told

them to you. But never mind; *I* think those doctors are a lot of old sillies! You are not really a bit bad; you don't look it."

"Kiss me, Nance," said Digby. "Keep your head near mine. It is a very comfortable little head to feel close to me as I grope—as I descend—ah! yes, child, what were you saying? Your mother—you must take great care of your mother, Nance. What's the matter, darling? Have the doctors gone yet?"

"I heard them driving away."

Nance did not speak again for some time. She turned her head slightly, so as to watch her father's face.

Digby was lying on his back; his eyes were open.

"How still you keep, father," she said at last; "you have not moved once since I jumped on the bed. Are you very, very tired?"

"I stay still because I cannot move, Nancy."

"Can't you, really? You must have had a bad fall! I shall hate Stella as long as I live. Father?"

"My little love?"

"*You* don't believe those doctors? *You* don't think that recovery depends on the amount of the injury, and *you* don't think it is a bad sign for parasisis——"

"Nance, listen to me," said Digby. He turned his head very slightly. His eyes were fixed on the child. "You have always been a very brave little girl."

"I?" Nance's face grew very white. "I have tried to be brave. You like me to be brave, don't you?"

"I *love* you when you are brave. I want you to be brave now."

"I will, father, I will."

Digby was silent for about half a minute. Nance sat up on the pillow and watched him.

"I can't say many more words to you, my little Nance," he began at last, in a slow voice. "My fall has hurt me *very* much, and it is difficult to—speak. I have often told you of the Golden Gates at the end of the road. Sometimes they seem a long way off, and we think that we shall take years and years before we reach them. But the strange thing about those gates, Nance, is this: When we think they are far, far away something happens; we look up, we find ourselves standing by them. The long road is ended, and we have reached the Golden Gates. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, father, I—I think so."

"You are a very brave little girl. I love you with all my heart. Nance, shall I go on?"

"Please, father."

"When I had that fall last night, that thing I told you of happened. I opened my eyes, and behold! the Golden Gates were a few feet away. I am waiting by them now."

"Are they going to be opened very, very soon, father?"

"Very soon, my little Nancy."

CHAPTER VII.

"I WAS EVER A FIGHTER."

CECILIA had made the ugly farm room as pretty as she could; she had put flowers about it, and slightly opened the casement windows. The early morning air was pouring into the room, sweet and fresh with the scent of the outside world. The sun had risen in great majesty, and some of his beams were also stealing into the chamber. Cecilia had changed her travel-stained and dirty white dress for another quite fresh and pretty, her hair was neatly arranged, and her whole appearance had the effect of a person who was not tired, not anxious, not in trouble of any sort.

All the emotions within her breast were kept under lock and key for the present. Cecilia knew that Digby was going to die, but a strange thing had happened. With the knowledge came also a wonderful and almost unnatural power. She was not inclined to faint, she did not cry, she did not moan.

"Time enough for that presently," she said to herself. "To the very end he shall see me as he has always liked to see me. That nervousness which he so dreaded shall not worry him. All those hysterical feelings which he has begged of me to conquer shall not appear. I will show him that I have learned my lesson—the lesson which his presence and his training for ten long, beautiful years have given me. I told him when little Nance was so ill long ago that I should do better next time. Next time has come, and I am doing better."

Cecilia murmured these words to herself many times through the night which had just passed: now, with the morning, she stood by her husband's side.

All that the doctors had prophesied had come to pass. As the hours flew by Digby grew weaker and weaker.

"He will die from exhaustion," Sir Charles Mackenzie had said. "As the time goes on the paralysis which affects all the upper portion of his body will become more and more marked—his speech will become more difficult—his ability to swallow food less and less. He will keep his consciousness to the last, and he will probably suffer not at all."

This was the great man's verdict, and it was carried out in Digby's case in every particular.

Cecilia stood erect by the bedside. The rays of the sun began to steal across the floor. They came farther and farther into the room and touched her white dress, and crept slowly farther and farther up her person until they shone upon her slim, lovely hands, and then touched her bright hair with a kind of glory. Digby lay on his pillows and watched her.

"Cecilia," he murmured, "your conduct during the past night has astonished me."

"You have told me in the past what to do, and I am doing it," she replied. "Don't think of me now, think of yourself."

"My dear," he said, "I have no need to think of myself. My thoughts are for you and Nance. Cecilia, you are a brave woman. I am glad to think that Nance will have a brave mother. She is a wonderfully brave little child herself."

"Laurence, I must ask you one thing," said Cecilia, with a break in her voice at last. "Nothing can startle me much now, and it is necessary for me to know. Is Nance likely to die of consumption?"

A faint flicker of pain passed over Digby's face.

"She has the hereditary taint in her system," he answered, with slow pauses in his voice. "You must take care of her; I can say nothing further."

"O Laurence, if only you had lived to perfect your discovery."

He opened his eyes very wide when she said this, and looked at her with anxiety.

"How wicked of me to trouble your last moments," she said.

"Never mind," he replied, "I am glad you reminded me. Stoop down—I have something to say. My discovery—Cecilia, had I lived, something might have come of it. I die. There are papers—directions—Cecilia—you must not let Phillips—get hold of them. You know the large secretary in my room? Go to it—after I am gone. Open the drawer—the top drawer—at the left-hand side—you will find papers—

they are marked 'Germ Theory—Imperfect.' They are all tied together—take them and—*either* burn them or fasten them up and seal them, and take them from me to Dr. Dickinson. Tell him anything you like. Tell him if you please—the story—I told you. But tell him also that my discovery in its present form is useless, dangerous. Be sure—Cecilia—that you say—to use the attenuated lymph on a human being in its present form would be—highly dangerous. Do you hear me?"

"Yes, yes."

"Don't forget—burn the papers if you like, but never—I charge you, Cecilia, never to let them get into the hands of that unscrupulous man, James Phillips."

"I promise never to do so," said Cecilia. "I promise most faithfully."

"Then I am satisfied. I commit you—to my God, my dear, dear wife. I commit you and little Nance to His tender mercies. The day breaks—I shall not be here when the sun sets. Kneel by me and pray."

Cecilia did kneel, the sun's rays streaming now all over her dress and slight figure. Digby's hand lay outside the bed-clothes; she pressed her cheeks against it as she murmured broken words.

"You don't fear death?" she said suddenly, looking into his eyes.

"No," he replied, "I have seen it too often. Do you know Browning's 'Prospice'? Can you repeat the lines?"

"'Fear death'?" began Cecilia. "Is that the piece you mean?"

"Yes, say it for me now. Begin not there: begin from 'I was ever a fighter.'"

"'I was ever a fighter,'" began Cecilia. She cleared her throat; her words fell on the dying man's ear, sweet and firm:

"I was ever a fighter—so one fight more,
 The best and the last!
 I would hate that death bandage my eyes, and forbore,
 And bade me creep past.
 No! Let me taste the whole of it, fair like my peers,
 The heroes of old,
 Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's arrears
 Of pain, darkness, and cold.
 For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,
 The black minutes at end,

And the elements' rage, the fiends' voices that rave
Shall dwindle, shall blend,
Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,
Then a light, then thy breast,
Oh, thou soul of my soul ! I shall clasp thee again,
And with God be thee rest ! ”

CHAPTER VIII.

IN DIGBY'S CONSULTING ROOM.

ONE of the saddest things in life, one of the most absolutely mournful things to reflect on, is this: However good we are, however useful, however valuable the work we do, the world can get on very well without us.

From the prince on his throne to the pauper who struggles to put bread into his children's mouths, this fact is illustrated every day.

One or two hearts break when we pass out of sight, one or two people go halt and maim through life for the rest of the journey, but the world at large continues to travel on its way just as it did before. For a week there is a fuss and a commotion, a wailing and a beating of hands. What will the world do, now that great light has gone out—that shining star no longer exists in the firmament? The old order must change at last—day must cease to follow night. Laughter must be stopped, mirth must die!

But day does not cease to follow night, and laughter goes on, and mirth is as gay as ever it was, and people feast and are merry, and find the world still a very good place. Other men step into the dead man's shoes and the dead man is practically forgotten.

Laurence Digby died. He was known to a very large circle of people, and his death made a profound impression. It was reported in the daily newspapers. Biographical sketches of his life were written, and his photograph appeared in some of the weekly illustrated papers. His patients were intensely sorry; his brother physicians said that his death was a great loss to science.

Digby died, and was buried. He had a great funeral; his patients from far and near came to see him laid to rest in Highgate Cemetery.

Cecilia stood by her husband's grave. She raised her eyes

to find herself surrounded by a sea of faces. Many of them—most of them, in fact—belonged to poor people. The crowd was full of sorrow, for a brother as well as a physician had passed from their midst; but in a week or two these people called in another doctor. This doctor also spoke kind words, and soothed their pains, and helped them to forget their miseries. Digby was not forgotten; but the world went on. It would have been very sad had it been otherwise.

Phillips had been extremely sorry for Digby. The tragic and sudden nature of his death even touched the cold and calculating heart of James Phillips. It was impossible for him to be jealous of a dead man. When jealously died, he found his memory bringing him day by day and hour by hour, pleasant recollections of the man whose work had been so suddenly terminated. Phillips had hated Digby living, but he felt a kind of affection for him now that he lay in his silent grave at Highgate. He was intensely sorry for Cecilia. He felt that he would like to adopt Nance as his own child, and he was unremitting in those small acts of kindness which go far to comfort in a time of bitter grief. Phillips would have given much to be able to restore Digby to life once more. With his death something had gone out of his own life. A hope—a very strong hope—had been buried in Digby's grave. Phillips had not a spark of originality or inventiveness in him. He could never hope now to persuade Digby to share his secret with him. He thought of this day and night, and fretted and fumed inwardly.

Phillips was a man with an intense tenacity of purpose. He was not clever, he was not learned. With regard to attainments, he was truly superficial. But ambition grew with the food on which it lived, and Phillips felt very sore—very sore, indeed—when Digby's death brought before him the patent fact that he could never now win a world-wide reputation for himself.

Cecilia did not come back to the house in Hartrick Street at once. She followed her husband to his grave, and then returned to the farmhouse at Hampton Wick. The good farmer and his wife were very kind to her, and she liked to sit in the room where her husband had breathed his last and muse over the words he had said to her, and think, in a kind of subdued, stunned way, about her future. Nance used to sit at her mother's feet and chatter, chatter in soft tones as the hours went by. Nance had a sweet voice, and her little talk was

very pretty to listen to. She seemed to know a good deal of what went on at the other side of the Golden Gates, and she was fond of telling her mother what she imagined her father might be doing at the present moment. Nothing gave Cecilia so much pleasure as to listen to Nance's pretty imaginings.

Digby was in his grave for over a week, and yet Cecilia could not yet bring herself to return to Hartrick Street.

A letter from Helen Phillips lay by her side.

"You ought to come," wrote Helen. "Things are in great confusion at No. 48. James says you ought to be on the spot."

Cecilia threw the letter on the floor, and did not reply to it. She went on listening to Nance's pretty talk.

"Now, Nan," she said, "what next? What is father doing now?"

"He often comes to the gates," began Nance, looking straight before her in her dreamy fashion. "Mother, what's the matter? Why do you start?"

"I saw a boy with a telegram in his hand pass the window," answered Mrs. Digby. "Run, Nance, darling, and see if it is for me."

Nance obeyed. She brought back the little yellow envelope, and gave it to her mother.

Cecilia tore the telegram open, and read its contents. They were from Phillips:

"If you are not coming back, send me the keys of your husband's secretary by post. Important. Am writing."

The telegram floated down to the floor, and lay beside the letter. Cecilia clasped her hands before her, and, bending slightly forward, sat and stared out of the window.

"Is there any answer for the telegraph boy, mother?" asked Nance.

"No, my darling, no answer."

Nance ran to the lattice window, pushed it open, and peeped out.

"There's no answer, boy," she cried in her sweet voice.

Then she went back and resumed her seat on the footstool by her mother's side.

"Shall I go on, mother?" she asked. "He's at the Golden Gates by now. He can see through them, and he's looking down into the world."

"Don't, Nance!" said Cecilia suddenly, in a voice choked with pain. "I can't bear it just now. Run away, dearest, and have a game in the hay field; I'll come out to you presently."

Nance gave her mother a quick, wistful look; she did not question, however—to question was never her fashion; she went slowly out of the room, a painful droop and want of vitality in her slender little figure.

Cecilia locked the door when Nance had left her, and, picking up Phillips's telegram from the floor, read it again.

"What does he want with my husband's keys?" she said to herself. "Oh, I know that he has been kind; he has been more than kind. He has taken all trouble off my hands. He and Helen have been like a brother and sister to me in this dreadful time. Of course he wants the keys to search for Laurence's will. If he were anyone else I would give them to him. I hate myself for being suspicious, but I cannot—I *cannot* give those precious keys to anyone, least of all to James Phillips."

There came a knock at Cecilia's door. Nance's little voice was heard in eager tones outside.

"Mother! Cousin George has come down from London to see you."

"What a relief!" said Cecilia to herself. "Dear George! No one would suspect him of anything underhand."

She opened the bedroom door, and went into the sitting room.

George was standing with his back to the light. His figure was inclined to stoutness, his face was broad and good-humored. He came up to Cecilia, and clasped both her hands in his old, affectionate manner.

"I am truly sorry to bother you," he began, "but Phillips sent me down. He wired to you first, and then he thought that I had better come. We want poor Digby's keys. May I have them to take back with me?"

"Which keys do you want, George? Some have already been given to James Phillips."

"The keys of the large secretary standing under the window in the consulting room."

"I would rather keep those keys."

"Why?"

"My husband kept papers in that secretary of a strictly private character. I do not wish anyone to examine his papers but myself."

"Then, forgive me, Cecilia—its' a sin to worry you—but you ought to come back to town."

"I shall come in a day or two."

"You ought to come at once. Digby's will cannot be found. It is sure to be in that locked up secretary; and we also want a copy of the lease of your house. I have an idea that Digby took Forty-eight on a long lease."

"On a twenty-eight years' lease," replied Cecilia. "We have been there a little over seven years."

"There are twenty-one years yet to run," said Lancaster. "That is good. Phillips is not leaving a stone unturned to help you, Cecilia; he hopes to get a good sum of money for you and Nance by a sale of the lease. There are two doctors already inquiring about the house. Mr. Crichton, the surgeon who came down here, is one. He is most anxious to conclude the matter at once. Phillips thinks you might let him have both furniture and lease. It would be an excellent arrangement. What is the matter? How white you look! Are you going to faint?"

"Faint? No, George." Cecilia's eyes shone with a queer expression. Suffering, long endurance, fortitude, and resolve, all leaped out of her eyes. She held herself erect, and looked full at her cousin.

It was impossible for him to understand the glance she gave him. He was conscious of an odd sensation, and hastened to change the subject.

"It's cruel of me to worry you with details now," he said. "Phillips and I are most anxious to spare you everything. If you will intrust me with the keys I will examine the secretary myself. We just want to find the lease and the will."

Cecilia hesitated for a moment. In that brief moment certain words came back to her memory: "I charge you, Cecilia, not to let my papers get into the hands of that unscrupulous man, James Phillips."

"I cannot give you the keys, George," she answered. "But I will bring them up to town myself to-morrow. It is cowardly of me to shrink from the pain of going back to Forty-eight."

"I will catch the next train to town, then," said Lancaster. "Is that you, Nance? Come in, come in! How white you look! Cecilia, that child isn't strong. You ought to give her cod-liver oil—I know where you can get it cheap. Oh, by Jove!" glancing at the clock, "is that the right hour? I'll

be off at once. I'll barely catch my train. By-by, Cecil. By-by, little kid! Eat all you can, and keep your mother cheerful."

George's sturdy figure was seen running down the lane. Cecilia and Nance stood by the window and watched him.

"I don't like Cousin George to call me a kid!" said Nance in a fretful voice.

She glanced at her mother for sympathy, but Cecilia's thoughts were miles away.

George went back to town, and told Phillips that Cecilia would not part with the keys of the secretary.

"It is very unreasonable of her, then," answered Phillips, his face flushing with anger.

"Oh, she'll come up herself to-morrow and look over the papers with us."

"That's all very fine. She may lose a good let by her scruples. Crichton is almost sure to take Forty-eight, and to pay a good figure for the lease, if only he can see it. Fifty-four and Sixty are also in the market, and, as he is in a hurry, he may close with either of them. I should not be in the least surprised if he gave from £700 to £1000 for the lease of Forty-eight, and if he bought the furniture into the bargain. What a lift that would be for Mrs. Digby—and all thrown away for a whim! I have no patience with women. Their unreason passes bounds."

"I don't suppose Crichton wants to decide to-day?" queried Lancaster.

"My dear fellow, that's just the point. I was to take the lease over to him this evening, and he was to show it to his solicitor in the morning. Mrs. Digby ought to have come up to town with you if she would not trust us with the keys."

"You can scarcely understand," began Lancaster. He stopped. He felt he could not explain himself. There was something unearthly about the farm, about Cecilia in her black dress, about Nance, who looked into his face with her sweet eyes but did not smile. It seemed to Lancaster that Digby's mantle of unworldliness had fallen, for the time being, on his widow and her child. In his heart he liked Cecilia all the better for wanting to remain in the antechamber from where her husband had gone into the arms of that grim king called Death.

Lancaster had the wholesome dread of death which all

healthy human beings ought to feel; but he knew that Digby was the sort of man to meet it without blanching.

Cecilia had gone with her husband to the edge of that other world. It seemed quite natural to Lancaster that she should not be greatly interested yet in the price of the lease or the sale of the furniture.

He stood knitting his brows as these thoughts came to him. Phillips, who was sitting at his desk in the window, looked up in an irritated manner.

"You seem quite moonstruck, Lancaster!" he said. "Have you any suggestions to make?"

"I don't know that I have. Cecilia won't be here until to-morrow, if we swear at her or not. Suppose we go back to Forty-eight, and have another good hunt for the lease?"

"No use. It is safe to be in the secretary."

"I am not so sure. I have an idea that Digby kept only his medical notes and papers in that secretary. We didn't half look through that old bureau at one side of the fireplace."

"Well," said Phillips in a resigned voice, "I'll come with you—not that there's the least use, I'm convinced."

The two men went into the next house. It was all dusted, and bright, and fresh. Cecilia's good staff of servants saw to all that. There were fresh flowers in the stands in the windows. The nice, bright curtains were newly draped, the whole house looked in apple pie order.

Lancaster sighed when he found himself in the hall. The very freshness and order of the house gave him pain. He was accustomed to this house—he came to it often, and the stillness, combined with the wonderful order, gave him a queer sensation. The house seemed to Lancaster something like a grave, all garnished and beautiful, and yet full of dead men's bones—the bones of buried hopes, buried loves.

Instinctively he hushed his voice, and stepped lightly as he walked across the hall. Rough in his exterior, Lancaster possessed a tender heart. Phillips, on the contrary, the essence of refinement in manners and appearance, was quite incapable of being moved by the orderliness, yet silence, of the house which had ceased to be a home. Phillips called to the servants in an aggressive tone. It never occurred to him to feel a particle of sentiment. He was sorry, of course, for more reasons than one, that Digby's valuable life had been cut short, but he was not a man seriously to mourn about anything that

did not directly affect himself. All the same, he meant to be thoroughly kind to the widow and the orphan.

The two men entered Digby's consulting room, and began a fresh search for the missing lease. The old oak bureau at one side of the fireplace was opened, drawer after drawer taken out, and the contents examined. The drawers of the bureau were mostly filled with anatomical specimens, but the bottom drawer contained papers.

A new interest came into Phillips's manner when he saw the papers. He began to search them thoroughly.

"It is no use your wasting your time over those," said George. "The lease will probably be on parchment, and you can see what it is at a glance. It isn't there in that heap; those are all notes of poor Digby's."

Phillips threw the notes back into the drawer.

"I said we should find nothing of value in this rubbish," he exclaimed. "Come away, Lancaster. I can't waste any more time. If Mrs. Digby is so scrupulous as not to trust us with the keys of the only place where the lease is likely to be, she must let the chance go by of doing a good bid with Crichton. After all, it isn't my affair. I am only helping her out of a spirit of friendliness. If she doesn't choose to meet me in the same spirit, I wash my hands of her."

"For goodness' sake, don't get into a rage with poor Cecilia," exclaimed Lancaster. "It is impossible for a woman when she is stunned to take an absorbing interest in leases and furniture. They are like so many dead bones, you know. Mere dust and ashes—all the flavor gone out of them. Cecilia is obliged to you—of course, anyone ought to be obliged to you, for you are taking a heap of trouble—but she can't realize things at present; she has got an awful shock."

"Mrs. Digby is like all women," answered Phillips, "full of whims, and unreasonable. Well, I must go and see some patients. Good-by, Lancaster."

Lancaster stayed behind a few moments to reduce the room to the absolute order in which they had found it. He locked the oak bureau, and put the key into his pocket. He took out his pocket handkerchief to flick away some specks of dust on Digby's writing table, then he seated himself in Digby's chair, and tried to fancy himself a doctor who, to some extent, held the lives of human beings in his hands. Nobody gave Lancaster credit for imagination, but he really had a great deal of it. He was profoundly ashamed of this

gift, and took the greatest possible pains to hide it from the eyes of his fellow men. To Lancaster his somewhat vivid power of picturing things, of seeing the ideal under the real, was by no means a gift of the gods to be prized and made much of. He looked upon it as a weakness, and blushed for himself when he could not help seeing a ghostly Digby walking about this room, and a ghostly Cecilia, with love shining out of her eyes, coming up to him and looking into his face with adoration and undying affection. Ghostly patients came in at the door, sat down on the chair where so many patients had sat, received their verdicts, and went away. Lancaster saw the whole scene—the vanished scene which Digby could never enact again. He got up, with a shudder, at last, muttering to himself:

“I am the greatest ass in Christendom! It is well that Phillips cannot see the thoughts that course through my muddled head. The best thing that I can do now is to run round and see another agent. By Jove, though! the agents will have shut up shop now. Well, well, Cecilia shan’t lose a good sum for the lease because she happens not to care about money to-day.”

Phillips went to see his patients. They talked of Digby, for his name was not quite forgotten, and Phillips answered them in tones of profoundest sympathy. They said, after he had gone, what a tender-hearted man Dr. Phillips was—how charming in every way. What a good thing it was that he was spared to his wife and the world at large. On the whole, he was a more agreeable man than Laurence Digby, and, if one of those valuable physicians had to go, it was just as well that Phillips was the one spared.

Phillips went home to his wife. They had dinner in their usual orderly fashion. The pompous and slow meal came to an end, and Helen went up to her drawing room. Phillips called to her as she was leaving the room.

“Don’t wait up for me, Helen,” he said. “I have a good deal to do to-night. I may even be going out for a little.”

She made no response. It was not her custom to question her husband’s doings. She went meekly out of the room, and crept upstairs with a dull look on her face. Helen found life dull, but it did not occur to her to think of herself as a martyr. James was a very clever, good sort of man, and she was lucky to have him for a husband. She did not even pretend to understand him, but that did not matter, for wives seldom

understood really clever husbands. As to Cecilia! But Cecilia was an exceptional woman. It was absurd to be unhappy because one had not genius. James said that Cecilia had genius. Helen was glad for her friend, but she was not jealous of her.

She sat down to her interminable embroidery, and wiped the tears now and then from her eyes as she thought of Digby, to whom she had been warmly attached. Presently she heard the hall door shut, and, stepping on to the balcony, she saw Phillips run down their steps and go into No. 48. What did he want in the Digbys' house at that hour?

"I suppose he is having a fresh search for the lease," thought Helen. She went back to her embroidery. Presently she rang the bell, and asked the servant to bring lights. The embroidery fell from her hands. She took up the third volume of a novel. It was not interesting; it fell to her lap. Her head was bent slightly forward; she was asleep.

Phillips went into No. 48, and was met in the hall by the servant.

"It's all right, Jacobs," he said; "I shall be occupied for an hour or two in your poor master's consulting room."

"Shall I bring lights, sir?" asked the man.

"If you please."

"Will you have any refreshments, sir? Wine or cigars, or anything of that sort?"

"No, thanks. Just see that I'm not disturbed, that's all."

Phillips went into the consulting room. There were no ghosts there for him. Jacobs followed in a few moments with a shaded lamp. He lit some candles on the mantelpiece, looked solemnly round, opened his lips as if to say something, shut them again with a world of meaning, and stepped noiselessly to the door, and closed it behind him.

"Now, you old spy, have you done?" said Phillips. He walked to the door, and deliberately locked it.

He was in evening dress—he invariably put on evening dress for dinner—and he looked what he really was, a strikingly handsome and distinguished figure. Vain men—and Phillips was essentially vain—are fond of looking at themselves whenever they can find an opportunity. After locking the door of the consulting room, Phillips walked up to the mantelpiece to glance at himself in the glass which he expected to find standing over it. He did this almost unconsciously. He had weighty work on hand—work on the suc-

cess of which depended all his future. But still, to gaze at his own handsome image was a gratification which he had no intention of denying to himself even at this critical juncture. He raised his eyes to be met by a blank.

It never occurred to Laurence Digby to have looking-glasses, as he termed them, in his consulting room.

Phillips laughed.

"Just like the man," he muttered; "the most unworldly soul in existence. When Crichton has this house, things will be differently arranged. Now then, now then. To find that lease. Mrs. Digby must not cut her own throat by her absurd scruples. Let me see. If I can lay my hands on that lease I can take it to Crichton early to-morrow morning. It will then be in time for his solicitor, and the whole matter may be satisfactorily arranged."

Phillips spoke half aloud. He was wandering restlessly about the room.

"I had better begin with the bureau," he said. "I didn't half look through those papers."

He drew a chair forward, and tugged at the lower drawer of the oak bureau. He was met by opposition. Lancaster had taken away the key. It now reposed in his pocket.

"Confound the fellow!" exclaimed Phillips, the color rising to his face. He put his hand into his own pocket, took out a bunch of keys, and deliberately tried key after key in the lock. There was nothing uncommon about the lock, and he soon found a key of his own to open it. He pulled the drawer wide open, knelt down on the floor, and began systematically to arrange the papers which were scattered about in it.

Lancaster had said that the lease would be written on parchment, and would be easily distinguished. Phillips did not seem to remember this observation. He looked for that lease on small fragments of paper, he tried to discover it among scattered notes, he read clues to it in this memorandum and in that. Suddenly he pushed the drawer into its place, got up, and stood in the center of the room.

"Now, shall I do it?" he said to himself. "Shall I rob my dear friend and his widow? It's a dirty thing to do. I have never been too good, but neither have I stooped to this depth before. My dead friend? faugh! He was never my friend. It was not in his nature to hate actively, but if he could hate, he hated me. I was good to him; no man was ever better to another. To my dying day I cannot forget how I helped

Digby. He has died without debts, with a wide reputation for goodness and cleverness. He has died suddenly, disastrously, but his life was a success, not a failure. If I had not stepped in, Digby's life would have been a failure. I made the man, and the man hated me. His wife hates me, too. Bless that woman! Can she ever conceal an emotion? It speaks in her eyes if it doesn't tremble on her lips. Cecilia Digby hates me. I have been very frank with Mrs. Digby. I have plainly told her why I helped Digby. He has gone from this earth, and his secret—his secret dies with him *unless I rescue it!* For the good of humanity I ought to do this thing. A valuable discovery lies buried. It is my bounden duty to take it out of its grave. As likely as not, Mrs. Digby will burn all the papers. To-night alone is left to me to save them. If I take them away she will never miss them. What can a woman know of science? I may or may not be able to use Digby's discovery; that all remains to be proved. But it is my duty to rescue it. Good heavens! Suppose a valuable thing of that sort went into the flames? Now then, what am I lingering for? The lease in the secretary: it is absolutely necessary to find the lease and the will, and if I come across anything else—anything of a thousand times more value than any lease or any will—I can rescue it; then I am a benefactor to mankind."

When Phillips came to this juncture in his meditation he burst into a loud laugh. Jacobs, who was moving about in an uneasy fashion in the hall, heard the laugh, and hurried down to the kitchen.

"What is the doctor doing in master's study?" he said. "I wish missis would come back. I don't see what call Dr. Phillips has in master's study."

"Why don't you go and tell him you want to lock up for the night, Jacobs?" asked Sally Jenkins.

"'Cos I knows my place," answered Jacobs loftily. He walked out of the kitchen. Sally Jenkins had a way of ruffling him up. He went back to the hall and moved a chair or two on purpose.

Phillips did not hear the chairs being moved. His laughter had been followed by one honest exclamation.

"I must get this discovery of Digby's into my own hands," he muttered, "and I mean to make myself famous with it. Farewell to sophistry: why should I try to deceive myself? I mean to be a blackguard for the sake of fame."

Having said this he felt more comfortable. As a rule, he was not even honest to himself, and this one honest speech gave him a sense of gratification. He took his bunch of keys once more out of his pocket, and, with great care, tried them one by one in the lock of the secretary. After a moment or two of sorting keys and examining of locks, he gave an exclamation of pleasure. One key turned in the lock quietly and smoothly, and Phillips pulled the long drawer open.

Book IV.—Temptation.

CHAPTER I.

THE LEFT-HAND DRAWER.

WHEN Phillips looked at the open drawer he gave an exclamation of pleasure. Digby, careless with regard to dress and personal appearance, was neat almost to a fault about his papers.

The drawer in question contained bundles of papers, strapped together with elastic bands and labeled. Phillips ran his eyes eagerly over the labels. He did not find what he wanted, but he had come upon an unexpected treasure. Digby had made notes of several of his most important cases. He had fastened these notes together in due rotation, and written on the label which was attached to each parcel the name of the disease which he had conquered. All particulars with regard to the cases were contained in these precious little packets.

Phillips felt his heart beating with pleasure. If he could possibly purloin these notes, he might step into Digby's shoes in every sense. He might take up consumption as his specialty, and work the cures that Digby could no longer perform.

"Patience," he said. "This search grows more exciting each moment. Shall I pay Mrs. Digby a price for the contents of this secretary, or shall I simply put the most interesting of the notes into my pocket? I think I shall do the latter. There is no saying what crochet Digby's widow may have got at the back of her head. Her suspicions may be aroused. She may refuse to give me the notes. If Helen had been Digby's wife there would have been no difficulty. Little Helen is above or below suspicion. It is a very good thing to have a wife with only an average intelligence. Cecilia Digby's intelligence is above the average. She can see through a man, can fathom his thoughts, can interpret his motives. She knows too much already. If she was unwilling to let me use Digby's discovery while he was alive, she will

be ten times less willing to intrust it to me now that he is dead. There is nothing for me but to play the blackguard. Now, let me see. This is a long job. I cannot run away with all Digby's notes, and yet I must look through them in order to discover the *magnum bonum*—the great discovery, which, in my hands, will benefit mankind. What a fool Digby was to withhold such a blessing from the race! Doubtless Providence meant him to die early in order to put the thing in my way. Faugh! Why should I speak of Providence—*something* directs our affairs, that is evident, but I fear I am forced to leave the Source of Good out of this business."

Phillips brought the candles from the mantelpiece and set them on the secretary. He resolved, if necessary, to sit up until morning. He must complete his task; he felt that it would be madness to allow his present opportunity to slip.

He had only opened one drawer as yet—there were many drawers in the secretary. It would take him hours to glean the cream from this mass of valuable evidence. He stood for a moment hesitating. The lease was forgotten, Digby's will was as if it had never been made. He said to himself:

"The first thing I must do is to send that old fool, Jacobs, to his bed. It would never do for him to potter about. I will go and speak to him."

He closed the drawer of the secretary, left the key in the lock, and, going across the room, opened the door and went into the entrance hall.

Jacobs was sitting in a mournful attitude on one of the hall chairs. He jumped up with alacrity when he saw Phillips; his face instantly assumed a cheerful and relieved expression.

"Are you going, sir?" he asked. "It is about time we was locking up."

Jacobs approached the hall door as he spoke.

"Lock up, by all means, my good fellow," said Phillips. "Go to bed. Get the other servants to go to bed. I shall not be leaving just yet. I have a great deal to do with regard to your poor master's papers, and I may not leave here until two or three in the morning. Lock up and go to bed."

"No, sir," said Jacobs, his face blanching. "The other servants may go to bed, but I shall sit up as long as it is your pleasure to remain, Dr. Phillips. I have the house in charge for my missis, and I prefers sitting up."

"Do as you please, of course," said Phillips, his face flushed

with annoyance. Jacobs saw the look, and disliked and suspected him more than ever.

Phillips was about to return to the consulting room when a noise in the street caused Jacobs to assume a listening attitude.

"Goodness gracious me!" he exclaimed. "If there aint a cab a-stopping at the door!"

He rushed across the hall, pushed back the bolt of the heavy hall door, and flung it open.

A childish voice was heard. A woman's tones replied. The next instant Cecilia and little Nance walked into the house.

Phillips felt himself turning pale to the lips.

Cecilia had seen him. She said a few words to Jacobs, who, forgetting all the proprieties, stooped down, picked little Nance up in his arms, and kissed her. Nance uttered a low cry, and put her arms very tightly round the old man's neck.

Cecilia went straight up to Phillips. He began to say something polite and sympathetic. She waved her hand to stop his words.

"Something told me you would be here," she said. "That is why I came."

"I am very glad you have come," he answered. "Your presence is much wanted. We require——" He paused. Cecilia raised her hand as if to interrupt him.

"I know what you are going to say," she said. "Have you been in my husband's consulting room? I see there are lights there. Shall we go there now together?"

"Yes, if you will." Phillips wondered, as he spoke, by what maneuver he could get into the consulting room first, in order to remove the key from the secretary.

"Yes, if you will," he repeated, backing toward the open door. "But you are tired, and there is no hurry."

"No hurry?" asked Cecilia in scorn. "To judge from your face at this moment, from your telegram, from George Lancaster's remarks, there must be all possible hurry. Nothing but the most undue haste could account for your being here looking into my husband's papers at this hour of the night."

"Of course," said Phillips, "if you will misinterpret my action——"

"Excuse me, I never misinterpret your actions. I always

know exactly why you are kind. If there is really no hurry, we will postpone our examination of the papers until to-morrow. If there is the extreme hurry you have given me to understand, we will go into the matter at once."

"Now that you are here, there is no special hurry," replied Phillips. "I want the lease because I think I have got you a good tenant, but to-morrow morning will do."

"Thanks," said Cecilia. "I will say good-night now."

She held out her hand. Phillips felt forced to accept her dictum.

"One moment," he said. "I left my hat in the consulting room."

He had not left it there, but any excuse was sufficient. He rushed into the room, took the key out of the secretary, slipped it into his pocket, and came back. He felt a sense of relief now, although he had left that drawer in Digby's secretary in hopeless confusion, although he knew that, unless some lucky occasion arose, he had lost the chance of securing the papers he so valued. He made one or two civil remarks to Mrs. Digby, tried to throw fresh sympathy into his manner, kissed Nance and inquired for her health, and, remarking that he would send Helen over the first thing in the morning, went away.

Jacobs shut the hall door after him with marked satisfaction, drew the bolts, put on the chains, and then turned to Mrs. Digby.

"It was the good Providence as sent you home, ma'am," he said.

"Yes, yes, Jacobs," replied Cecilia. "Now, will you tell Henny-Penny to come down for Nance. Tell Henny-Penny to put her to sleep in my room."

"Aren't you going to bed yourself, ma'am?"

"Not at present. I am not at all sleepy. Jacobs, do you mind sitting up for an hour or two?"

"I'd meant to sit up if you hadn't come home, ma'am. Dr. Phillips, he ses to me, ses he, 'I will be in your poor master's consulting room two or three hours,' ses he, 'but you may go to bed, Jacobs,' he ses, 'and so may the other servants.' 'No,' I ses, 'the other servants may go to bed, but I sits up,' I ses. Dr. Phillips, he gets red all over, and then you came up, ma'am, in the cab, and I were never better pleased in the whole of my born days."

Cecilia took off her bonnet, and stood in her long, plain

black dress in the hall. Her brows were knit in perplexity, her face was very white.

"Jacobs," she said, "I believe you are faithful to your master. Will you be just as faithful to me as long as I can retain you in my service?"

"I will, ma'am. You needn't ask me twice. I'd have done anything under the sun for Dr. Digby, and I'd do as much for you and Miss Nance, ma'am."

"Give me your hand, Jacobs."

The old servant stretched out his horny fingers, and Cecilia grasped them in her slim, white, delicate ones.

"It's a bargain," she said. "You are faithful to me. Now, I want you to obey a distinct order."

Jacobs drew himself up.

"Yes, ma'am," he said.

"You are not, under any pretext, to allow Dr. Phillips to enter my husband's consulting room."

"I will have much pleasure in obeying your order, ma'am," said Jacobs, with a gleam of satisfaction in his eyes.

"That is all," said Cecilia. "You must be polite, of course, but you must be equally firm. You have my distinct orders, and they are sufficient."

"Is Mr. Lancaster to come into the consulting room, ma'am?"

"Yes, if he pleases—that is, if he wishes particularly to see me. Dr. Phillips is not to enter the room on any pretext whatever. If he wants me, show him into the dining room. That is all, Jacobs. Keep your own counsel. You are to be very firm."

"I quite understand, ma'am, and you may rely on me."

"That is all, for the present, Jacobs. If Sally Jenkins has not gone to bed, tell her to send me up a cup of tea to the consulting room. She may go to bed afterward. I cannot see her or any of the other servants to-night. I should like you to sit up."

Jacobs ran downstairs to execute Mrs. Digby's orders. Nance was carried off to bed, clasped in a rapturous embrace, by Henny-Penny.

Cecilia, leaving her bonnet, with its long crape veil on the hall table, went into the consulting room, and closed the door behind her.

"I knew it! I have only just been in time," she exclaimed. "Have I been in time? Did he dare to tamper with the secre-

tary? When he saw me come in, the mask dropped from his face for a moment, and I caught a glimpse of his base, ignoble soul. No wonder I could not rest at Hampton Wick! No wonder I felt the queerest, strangest fears drawing me home! Home? Do I call this place home? No, it is an empty shell with the heart taken out. I am not going to give way," she continued. "I have held up all this time, and I am not going to give way now. I have my work before me. I see that there will be a stand-up fight between James Phillips and me. He very nearly won during my absence this evening, but his chance is over. He shall never, as long as I live, have the opportunity to spy and pry into my husband's private papers again. First of all, to find the lease and the will. They are the ostensible reasons for this wholesale robbery. The excuses shall be removed before I go to bed to-night."

Jacobs knocked at the door. He had brought up the tea, hot and fragrant. Cecilia went and took the tray from the old servant's hands.

"Jacobs," she said, "I want you to go up to the box room. Find a good-sized trunk, with strong hinges and lock in perfect order. Empty it, if anything happens to be inside, dust and clean it, and bring it down to me here. Henny-Penny is still up, and she will help you to bring it downstairs. Leave it in the passage outside this door. I will ring the bell when I want it."

Jacobs withdrew, well pleased.

"The missis is the right sort," he murmured under his breath. "Drat that Phillips! He has met his match in the missis. Coming a-spying and a-rooting in the poor master's room when he is scarce cold in his grave, I call it downright indecent! But your little game is over, Dr. Phillips, or my name isn't Samuel Jacobs. It's a good thing the missis has got a will of her own. There's no mistake on that point, and so I ses to Sally Jenkins when she riles me. The missis is a right good sort, I ses, but she ain't no angel, for she's just a woman as full of fads as an egg is full of meat; she's a right good sort, only I don't, and never will, place her level with the poor doctor. He was an angel, and the missis, she's mortal, and there's a sight of difference between the two—not but what I'd hold by the missis, and serve her faithful, and for no wage either, for the poor master's sake."

Holding a lamp in his hand, Jacobs went up to the top of the big house.

Cecilia locked the door of the consulting room, took a bunch of keys out of her pocket, and, sitting down in front of the secretary, proceeded to open the drawers. She pulled open the long drawer in the middle first. When she did so she uttered an exclamation, and some very angry fire flashed into her eyes.

"Meddled with!" she muttered. "Laurence never kept his papers in this state! These papers have been opened and tampered with. That wretch must have tried to pick the lock! No, the lock is uninjured. He must have found a key to open it. Oh, that accounts for his being so anxious to get back to this room for his hat, which happened to be in the hall all the time! He wanted to remove the key. Oh, good Heavens! Has he touched the drawer—the small drawer on the left-hand side? Have the papers been touched?"

Cecilia's hand shook. She once more took the key out of the lock and fitted it into the small drawer, then, deadly white to the lips, pulled it open.

At another time the sight of the neatly arranged drawer would have raised a passion of grief and regret. Now she uttered a cry of delight, raised the untouched packet from the drawer, and pressed it to her lips.

"I thought my dream had come true," she exclaimed—"that awful dream that I had on that awful night! Oh, it was sent as a warning. But I have been in time. Thank you, good God, kind God, for letting me be in time."

Cecilia kissed the papers again and again.

"They are safe!" she exclaimed. "They shall never get into those bad, wicked hands. Now, shall I light a fire and burn them? Laurence said, 'Cecilia, burn the papers—the experiment is dangerous.' Shall I light a fire and do what he asked? I could do it, and they would be safe forever. Shall I? I think my husband would be pleased. Does he stand by the gates and look down into the world, and does he see? Darling! Can you see? No, no, it's a child's fancy—the pretty fancy of a sweet child, absolutely impossible, absolutely untrue. Laurence has gone behind a thick veil; he has gone into the unknown, into the mysterious; he has passed from my sight, and I am alone. He asked me to burn the papers. I saw something in his eyes when he said, 'Burn the papers, Cecilia.' His dying eyes looked at me with great earnestness, with profound appeal. 'Burn the papers, Cecilia,' he said. 'The discovery is dangerous, incomplete,

useless.' I should have said 'Yes,' had he stopped there, but he didn't stop there. Something in my face—it must have been that—impelled him to go on. He said something else. He gave me an alternative. 'Burn the papers,' Laurence said, 'or, put them into a packet and seal them up, and take them from me to Dr. Dickinson. Tell him the story I once told you, and ask him to take charge of my useless and incomplete discovery.' Laurence gave me my choice; now, which shall I do?"

"The trunk is outside the door, ma'am, whenever you want it," called Jacobs's voice from the hall.

"Thank you, Jacobs, presently. I will ring when I want you to bring it in," answered Cecilia.

She started up from her husband's chair, and began to walk up and down the room.

"Now, which shall I do?" she exclaimed again. "Shall I burn the papers, or shall I take them to Dr. Dickinson? I know which, in his heart, Laurence would have liked. He had the queerest feeling always about this discovery. He was a brave man—the bravest I ever met—and yet he was afraid of this thing which he himself had found out. He would like me to burn the papers. Dear Laurence! Cecilia will do what you like. It is an awful sacrifice, for I believe in the cure, but I must please you, Laurence. I could read his face so well, I could see by the expression in his eyes what he really wished me to do. I will light a fire. That is the first step. Where are the matches? Laurence generally kept them in this little box on the mantelpiece. No matches here; is the fire laid in the grate? He liked to have a fire always ready. He wished to have it kept laid, so that he might put a match to it at any minute. No fire—nothing in the grate! How careless of the servants!"

Cecilia felt foiled. The resolution to which she had almost come, with the memory of her husband's dying words ringing in her ears, grew dim. She began to falter, the desire to do the first right thing that presented itself became faint within her. She turned from the empty grate, from the stand which contained no match box, and said to herself:

"Providence, or Destiny, or what you will, has interposed. I can't burn Laurence's papers to-night. Perhaps, after all, they *are* meant to bless the world; perhaps my husband's dying instinct was a wrong instinct. Oh, I am glad there was no fire in the grate, no means of lighting one. I am glad,

I rejoice. It would have been wicked to quench this light, this possible light, this possible blessing, even to humor the wishes of the dead. Even for your sake, Laurence, I stop at this. You were too humble; you did not know your own greatness; you did not know that genius was poured into your veins; you did not know the strength of that brain of yours; you had one fault, and only one—you mistrusted yourself. I will *not* destroy the papers; I will *not* commit your discovery to the flames. I have been prevented; I am glad. Doctor Dickinson is great and clever. He is also generous and honorable. He will make use of your discovery, Laurence, and acknowledge you as its author. I will seal up the packet, and take it to him to-morrow, or next day."

Cecilia went to the door and opened it.

"Are you there, Jacobs?" she called out.

"Yes, ma'am."

"You can bring that trunk into the room now. Thank you. Put it here, please. Jacobs, how long was Dr. Phillips in the consulting room before I came?"

"Exactly forty-seven minutes, ma'am; I watched him by the clock."

"Jacobs, I did not mean to come home to-night."

"It's a good thing as you changed your mind, Mrs. Digby."

"I think it is a good thing. Thank you, Jacobs; the trunk will do nicely there. I am going to put some of your master's papers into it, and to-morrow Miss Nance and I will take it away. You can leave me now, but don't go to bed."

"No, ma'am, I'll sit in the hall; if you touch the poor master's gong, I can be with you in half a minute, ma'am."

Jacobs went out of the room, and Cecilia began her task. She went quickly through the work she had imposed upon herself. She was no longer troubled by indecision. She knew exactly how to act. The open trunk was drawn up near the large secretary, and one by one she emptied the contents of the drawers into the trunk. All the neatly docketed papers were placed in it, and several large books, full of Digby's memoranda with regard to his consulting patients, were placed at the bottom.

It was two or three hours before the large secretary was emptied, but at last it stood with all its drawers unlocked and partly open. The drawers contained no value for anyone now. The secretary was reduced to a mere piece of furniture; it ceased to be the casket of a priceless treasure.

Neither the lease nor the will was found in the secretary. Digby had always kept his medical memoranda and his private papers apart. Cecilia had assured both Phillips and Lancaster on this point, but they had not believed her.

After completing her task, locking the trunk, and putting the key into her purse, she spent a little time looking for the missing will and for the lease of the house. She found them at last in an old-fashioned desk which had belonged to Digby's mother, but which no one had thought of examining. She put them on a table without troubling to open them.

Now she had a last task to perform. She must seal up the parcel which was to be intrusted to the care of Dr. Dickinson.

She sat on her husband's chair for that purpose, took up a couple of sheets of foolscap paper, folded the packet carefully in them, and, slipping Digby's signet ring from her own first finger, sealed the packet.

The final thing was to direct it. She wrote Dr. Dickinson's name in full on the glazed foolscap paper, dried it on the blotting paper, and, being very tired by this time, laid her head suddenly on the little packet, and dropped into a troubled sleep.

Her sleep lasted but a moment or two; she awoke with a start, clasping the packet frantically to her heart.

"No, I won't give it up," she exclaimed. "Dr. Phillips wants to steal it from me. He is dangerous and unscrupulous. Laurence said so. He wants my husband's discovery. He shan't have it. Why am I frightened? I just had a dream, and the hour is very late, and I am stiff with weariness and sorrow. I am very tired; I will call Jacobs."

Cecilia went to the door and opened it. The old man was sound asleep on a chair in the hall. She went and touched him.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Digby. I didn't know I had dropped asleep."

"It was quite natural for you to sleep, Jacobs. I am sorry I kept you up so long. There is one more thing I want you to do. I want that trunk which has just been locked to be well strapped. Fetch a strong leather strap, and bring it to me to the consulting room."

"Yes, ma'am, there are several in the box room."

Jacobs was absent a very few minutes. Mrs. Digby stood near as he firmly strapped the heavy trunk.

"Now," she said, "I am going to seal the strap. The strap of this trunk cannot be unfastened without breaking the seal."

"No more it can, ma'am. That's a downright good thought," said Jacobs.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. DIGBY ACTS WITH PROMPTITUDE.

EARLY next morning, before anyone was stirring at No. 47, Cecilia got up and dressed herself. She did not wake little Nance, who was still lying asleep in her mother's bed. Henny-Penny came to the door, and Mrs. Digby gave her a few directions with regard to the child.

"Give her some breakfast as soon as she wakes," she said, "but do not disturb her: let her sleep on as long as she may. I shall be back probably by eleven or twelve o'clock."

Jacobs called a cab for his mistress, and the heavy trunk was hoisted to the roof. Cecilia stepped into the cab, and told the driver to take her to King's Cross.

Soon after nine that morning Miss Timmins, in her little cottage, was startled, and very nearly thrown off her equilibrium by the sight of Cecilia in her widow's dress, standing at the gate.

Miss Timmins had not seen her friend since Digby's death, and when she saw Cecilia now she felt a nervous inclination to run away.

Miss Timmins had the kindest heart in the world, but one of her peculiarities was a certain shrinking from the sight of intense grief.

Cecilia seemed able to read her old friend's thought in her face.

"Never mind, Aunt Abigail," she called out, for she had adopted little Nance's name for the old lady. "You need not fear seeing me. Do you notice that cab? There is an enormous trunk on the roof. Will you take it in?"

"To be sure, my dear," answered Miss Timmins; "the only difficulty is, will it get through the hall door?"

"Your back door is wider than your front," said Cecilia. "We will take it round that way—I have thought it all out. The trunk can be got into the house; the only question is, when once it is inside, where is it to stand?"

"In the kitchen," said Miss Timmins. "I have no doubt,

Cecilia, by your bringing me that trunk at so *early* a date, that it contains something valuable. The kitchen is much the safest place to keep it in. Now then, cabman, you must call assistance; you cannot possibly carry in that enormous trunk by yourself."

The cabman grinned, and motioned with his thumb to where one or two men were lounging about.

Between them they conveyed the great box round to Miss Timmins's back door, and, with jerks and pushes and vigorous efforts, it was landed at last in the little kitchen. It must be confessed that it much injured the appearance of this tiny room, but neither Cecilia nor Miss Timmins cared anything for that.

The cabman and his assistants were paid and dismissed, and Cecilia sat down by the old lady and looked into her face.

"It is all over," she said. "I am much as I was before. You took me in before when I was very desolate and lonely; I want you to take me in again—I want you to give Nance and me a home."

"My dear child," said Miss Timmins. The tears slowly welled into her old eyes, and her withered hand, which she laid on Cecilia's smooth one, trembled.

"You need not be afraid that I shall give way," said Mrs. Digby. "I feel as if I should never give way again. Perhaps I am stunned, or perhaps this calm is the effect of my husband's teaching. It doesn't seem to me worth while to cry; tears do no good. Miss Timmins, that trunk contains priceless treasures."

"My dear," said Miss Timmins, with a little start, "you must remember that I keep no man about the premises. Would it not be safer for you to send your plate and valuables to a bank? We always did that in our rich days, dear. When we went for our summer holiday, the plate went to the bank."

"That trunk contains things infinitely more valuable than all the plate in the world," answered Cecilia; "but there is only one person who would desire to rob it, and he won't come here. The trunk contains my husband's medical papers and——"

"You need not go on," said Miss Timmins, nodding her head; "it's safer to mention no names. I *quite* understand; no fear that he will come here, my love—he knows *me!*"

Cecilia jumped up and kissed the old lady,

"It cheers me to talk to you," she said. "But now, what about the future? I must go back to No. 48 Hartrick Street almost immediately, for I want to pack my clothes and to get everything ready for removal."

"You ask me," said Miss Timmins, "to give you and Nance a home. You know the accommodation of this house."

"I do," said Cecilia; "the house is too small."

"Then, my dear——"

"Stop!" exclaimed Mrs. Digby. "I have a proposal to make. I expect you won't like it, but perhaps for my sake and for Nance's you will consent to it. I want you to move with me to a larger house somewhere in the country—somewhere even farther out of town than Highgate. I want you to take Nance and me in just for to-night, and to-morrow we will go into a larger house."

Miss Timmins turned pale. She looked slowly round her little kitchen. She loved the tiny room; it had witnessed her dull, unselfish, tranquil existence for many long years. She was old, and she shrank from taking a new step. Could she cough as comfortably in any bedroom as in that small room upstairs with the sloping roof? Could she protect herself so thoroughly from draughts in any other apartment? They poured down the chimney in that room, they entered also by many cracks in the roof, they entered in hurricanes, when the wind was high, through the badly fitted window: nevertheless, Miss Timmins, with skill and method, had managed to protect herself from them. She would have great trouble in making arrangements for her comfort in a new and larger bedroom. These thoughts flitted rapidly through her brain as Cecilia stood opposite to her. She was silent for a few minutes; then she said in a gentle voice without a trace of opposition in it:

"Very well, Cecilia. You always did exactly what you wished with me. Only I do not see how it is possible to move from this house to-morrow. We have to find another house to go to, and when we have found it, it has to be furnished and got ready for us."

"We will take a furnished house for the present. I do not wish to stay at No. 48 Hartrick Street. I shall take away my own things to-day, and then George Lancaster will manage the sale of the furniture."

"My dear, are you going to sell your beautiful furniture—the furniture that we bought together?"

"Yes, Aunt Abigail. Can't you understand that the salt has lost its savor?"

"My poor child!"

"Don't pity me; I can't bear pity. Aunt Abigail, we will shut up this little cottage for the present, and go into a furnished house in a quiet place where we can be together. Henny-Penny shall come with us, and Sally Jenkins. Henny-Penny must still take care of Nance, and Sally Jenkins can do the housework just as she used to do in the dear old Coxmoor Street days. Will you look for the house to-day, Aunt Abigail?"

"To-day, my dear? This is very sudden; and I don't know what you require."

"I require a house with two sitting rooms, one where we can have meals, one where I can write and keep my dear husband's papers, and be alone when I wish to be alone. The house must also have a kitchen for Sally Jenkins to reign over, and a bright nursery for Henny-Penny to be happy in. There must also be a bedroom for Nance and me, and another for you, and a room in the roof—she likes sleeping in the roof best—for Sally Jenkins. That is all. That is a very humble sounding house, is it not? A house built on a common pattern; there must be hundreds of such houses scattered all over the country. Put on your bonnet, Aunt Abigail, and come down with me to the railway station. I shall take a train back to town. Will you, at the same time, take a train into the country? When you see houses few and far between, and plenty of green fields, and when you smell the fresh air of heaven without any contamination of brick, mortar, or smoke, then get out of the train, and look for a furnished house in that neighborhood."

"Dear me, my love, you are as unpractical as ever. What sort of a ticket am I to take at the ticket office? Where am I to book to? And how can I possibly find all that you require—even though your requirements are small—dropped down from the skies in a country place? I must go to a small town or village and find a house agent."

"Yes, Aunt Abigail, you know exactly how to set about it. Come, there is no time to be lost."

Cecilia's arrangements were carried into effect. Miss Timmins spent a tiring day, but at last she found a pretty house, standing in a large garden; the house was to be let furnished, and the old lady took it on the spot.

Cecilia, Nance, the two servants, and Miss Timmins arrived there on the following day, and No. 48 Hartrick Street began to assume, in Cecilia's eyes, the cloudy appearance of a dream house.

Mrs. Digby said a few words to her cousin George before she went away.

"George," she said emphatically, "I can't remain here."

"Very well, Cecil; I can quite understand your feelings."

"I am going into the country, and dear old Abigail Timmins is going to keep me company."

"Won't you find it awfully dull?"

"I don't think so. I like the country best. The country air suits Nance. I mean to bring her up as much as possible out of London."

"Do you know anything about your money affairs."

"Not a great deal. I am sorry to say that I never saved anything out of Laurence's yearly income. He used to give the money to me; I always meant to put by a certain portion of it, but it got spent somehow. I am afraid I was extravagant."

"Have you the least idea what your husband's yearly income was?"

"He earned a great deal of money. I can look up my books if you like."

"No, don't worry. What's the good, if it's all gone? It seems a pity that you didn't save something, but it can't be helped. Digby insured his life, didn't he?"

"Yes, for a couple of thousand pounds."

"Well, you will have that. And there is the sale of the furniture, and what we can get for the lease, and then the horses and carriages will bring in something."

"Yes; you will manage it all. I know Laurence made you my trustee."

"I will do the best I can for you, Cecil; you may be sure of that."

George paused. His next words came with a certain hesitation.

"Phillips has been very active on your behalf, Cecilia."

"I know it," she replied. "I am heartily obliged to him; still, for every reason, I wish you to have complete authority in making arrangements for me."

"It must be as you wish. Now, about your furniture. Do you wish to retain any?"

"Yes; my husband's secretary, his armchair, and all his medical books."

"The secretary is full of papers, no doubt," said George. "You will like to look at them by and by."

"Come into the consulting room with me, George."

Cecilia led the way as she spoke.

"See," she said, pointing to the secretary, "it is empty. I emptied it last night."

"You came here, and did all that work last night?"

"I did. I sat up until it was done. I cannot give you my reason."

"Suppose I guess?" said George, flushing a dull red. "You found Phillips here?"

"I did. It was between ten and eleven at night when I arrived, and he was in the house. He was in this room, busy looking——"

"Looking for the lease!" interrupted George. "I never saw a man in such a fret as he was in over that lease—he simply gave me no peace about it. I don't believe myself that Crichton was in such a fearful hurry—I cannot think that a few hours really mattered."

"It is all right now," said Cecilia gently. "We will say nothing further on the subject. Good-by, George. That empty secretary can tempt no one, and I should like to have it as soon as it can be moved. Good-by. Give my love to Millie, and to Aunt Charlotte. I am going in to see Helen Phillips before I leave."

Phillips made no remark whatever when Helen told him that her cousin had come to say good-by to her, and had declared her intention of not returning to London at present. His face flushed and he bit his lips, but he uttered no words of any sort. He called at No. 48 that afternoon, but Jacobs had his orders, and Phillips had to return to his own house without having obtained that glimpse which he wanted of the interior of Digby's consulting room.

Cecilia went to the country, and in process of time her house was re-let and the lease sold for £700, a good sum also being given for the furniture.

Mr. Crichton, a very rising surgeon, took possession of Digby's old house. His name appeared on a plate on the door, and Digby, his wife, and child began to be forgotten by their London friends.

CHAPTER III.

OUGHT CONSUMPTIVE PEOPLE TO MARRY?

It was a lovely day in October, and Dorothy Sharpe sat near an open window in the large drawing room in the house in Cadogan Square.

The Sharpes had just returned from Scotland, and Dorothy and her mother had busied themselves during the morning giving their lovely house its home look. Favorite books and photographs came out of retirement, and Dorothy spent nearly two hours arranging cut flowers in every bowl and vase within her reach.

Dorothy Sharpe still retained the extremely slender figure of her youth. She was two-and-twenty now, but she did not look more than seventeen. Her complexion was beautiful, and her face had the soft, peachlike bloom about it which is seldom seen after a girl passes twenty. Her rich chestnut hair was fastened in a knot on the top of her head. She wore a trailing, pale blue dress of a soft texture; as she bent over her flowers she coughed once or twice.

Lady Sharpe, who was writing notes at her davenport in another part of the room, heard the cough, and it disturbed her. Sir Probyn wished to give a dinner next week to the few friends who had already ventured back to London. It was sure to be a prosy affair, and Lady Sharpe sighed as her pen flew over the paper. Sir Probyn's dinners were necessary. He was a man of high eminence at the bar; but they were always long and dreary, and Dorothy invariably looked tired when they were over.

Hack—hack! The young girl was arranging some roses in a splendid, creamy vase—they trembled in her small hands, one of them dropped on the floor. She stooped to pick it up, coughing again as she did so.

Lady Sharpe suspended her pen in the air.

"I won't notice the cough this time," she said to herself. "It only worries the dear child. I ought not to be nervous. Dr. Digby said—ah! what a loss that man is to Dorothy and me."

Lady Sharpe wrote another note, and Dorothy, having arranged her flowers, went and sat by the open window, and, taking up "*Aurora Leigh*," began to read it.

Her bright cheeks were flushed with a little extra color;

her soft, sweet, hazel eyes had a starry brilliance about them. She looked up impatiently now and then, glancing sometimes at the door, sometimes at the open window. She had the attitude of a girl who was waiting for something or somebody.

Hack—hack! That short, dry cough again! Lady Sharpe could sit silent no longer.

“Dolly, my darling, I wish you would not stay so near the open window.”

“I am hot, and the breeze is delicious, mother,” she answered.

“You have caught a little cold, I am afraid.”

“No, I have not the slightest trace of cold. Get up, mother, and look at this bowl of white roses. I had just enough to fill the bowl.”

Lady Sharpe rose, and Dorothy went with her to the farther end of the room.

“Smell, mother!” she exclaimed. “Dip your nose well in, and take a draught of the heavenly perfume.”

“The roses are perfect, my dear, but my sense of smell is not keen. I wish, Dorothy, you would not spend so much time over the flowers. You may have caught a chill, dabbling your hands in that cold water.”

“I assure you, mother, that I have not the smallest chill.”

“Dearest, you have been coughing.”

“Just a little hack or two, as if that signified! Now, mother, are you going to allow the old terror to seize you again?”

“No, my dearest, no. You are well; I know that. You are well, on the whole, but it is only right to be careful, as Dr. Digby used to say——”

“Ah, mother, don’t speak of him.”

Tears brimmed into Dorothy’s eyes. She turned from her mother, and walked back to the open window.

The sound of wheels was heard in the square. A private hansom drew up at the Sharpes’ house, and a man got out.

Dorothy stepped on the balcony, peeped quickly and shyly over, then re-entered the drawing room with her cheeks in a flame and her heart beating.

“Has anyone come, my dear?” asked Lady Sharpe, who had returned to her davenport.

“Yes, mother. Mr. Crichton is coming upstairs.”

Lady Sharpe turned and looked at Dorothy.

“If you wish I’ll go away,” she said.

"No, mother, not to-day, please. It is better not."

"My love, how white you have turned."

"I felt tired for a second," answered Dorothy. "Don't go, please, mother."

"I'll be guided by circumstances," replied Lady Sharpe.

The drawing-room door was flung open by a servant, and Mr. Crichton, a good-looking young man of about seven-or-eight-and-twenty, entered the room. He was of medium height, and spare in figure. He had a dark, smooth head of closely cropped hair, a slightly olive complexion, and kindly eyes. A light leaped now into those eyes when he saw Dorothy, and the most casual observer would have noticed at a glance that these two were lovers, although no word of love had yet passed between them.

"How do you like your new house?" asked Lady Sharpe. "Do you not feel lost in such an enormous mansion? And are you not——"

"Don't the ghosts ever come to trouble you?" asked Dorothy in a low voice, full of intense feeling. "My one great quarrel with you, Mr. Crichton, is this: How *could* you take the Digbys' house?"

"It is possible, Miss Sharpe, to treat a dead friend's house in such a way that his ghost shall never feel any sense of insult. I am settled there now. I like the house; I don't feel it eerie. If Digby's influence still pervades his consulting room, so much the better for me and my patients. Lady Sharpe, won't you and Miss Dorothy come and lunch with me one day next week? I most earnestly desire this," he added, looking full into Dorothy's face, "for where a morbid feeling exists, the sooner it is combated the better."

"I can't go," answered Miss Sharpe; "you ask an impossibility."

She rose and went back to the balcony, where she stood struggling with emotion, which she felt half ashamed of and yet could not conquer.

"It is always the way," whispered Lady Sharpe. "Few people have fretted for Dr. Digby as our child has done. I do not think she has ever been quite the same since his death."

"I will leave the house if the idea of going into it pains her so dreadfully," said Crichton. Then, perceiving all that his words implied, a wave of dark crimson swept over his face. "Lady Sharpe," he exclaimed impulsively, "you must know what I want. You must have seen——"

"Yes, yes, my dear boy, I have seen—I do know."

"God bless you! you speak kindly. Is there the ghost of a hope?"

Lady Sharpe laughed and rose from her chair.

"I am not going to betray a secret," she exclaimed. "Go and talk to Dorothy. I fancy she must have expected you this afternoon, for nothing would induce her to go out."

"I'll give up the house if she objects to it. I would not hurt her feelings for the world. I honor her for her grief. Digby was worthy of it."

"That he was. Dorothy would not be in the world now, if it had not been for his care. Mr. Crichton, you have heard, you must have heard, that her life is not a strong one."

"I have heard something of the kind, but all the more reason that I should cherish it if she will let me."

"Well, go and have a talk with her. I know you are a favorite, but I can admit nothing further."

Lady Sharpe left the room, and Crichton, after a brief hesitation, stepped on to the balcony, and stood by Dorothy's side.

"You know what I have come for?" he said, looking into her eyes. "You must have seen it for a long time. Dorothy—forgive me for calling you by your name—you must have seen that I love you beyond all else on earth."

"I—I know," said Dorothy. She turned her head away, her hands trembled.

"And you love me," exclaimed the young man. "Say yes, Dorothy. Say you will be my wife. I know I can make you happy, that is, if devotion—the deepest devotion, can effect anything."

"Yes," she replied, looking him full in the face now, "I know that with you I should have that perfect happiness which comes now and then in this world; but it cannot be, Mr. Crichton. It can never, never be."

Dorothy turned away once more. She put her hands to her face, the tears trickled through her fingers.

"My darling, there is some mystery here," said Crichton. "If you love me and I love you, why cannot we marry? Your mother does not object. I spoke to her about you, and I am quite convinced by her manner that she would give you to me. Sir Probyn, too, has always been most friendly. Why do you fear, Dorothy? If it would be perfect happiness to

us both to live together, why should we deny ourselves what God evidently meant us to enjoy?"

"It cannot be," repeated Dorothy.

"Is it because of the house that I have taken? Surely my presence would chase all the ghosts away. But if that is your real objection, Dorothy, I will take another house. I will give up No. 48 Hartrick Street at any sacrifice. Listen, consider. Don't cast me off; all my future depends on you."

"It must not," she replied.

She had wiped her tears away now, and looked at him with a sweet, pale face. "I do love you," she said, "but I don't think I ought to marry you; I don't think I ought to marry anyone."

"Why do you say that? You must give me your reason."

"Don't ask me for my reason."

"It is scarcely fair of you to withhold it. You must have seen for months, for nearly a year, that I cared for you; you have not discouraged me. It is due to me now that you should speak quite frankly."

"I did encourage you," said Dorothy. "When you spoke to me I derived pleasure; when you were kind it seemed as if the sun shone. I had been happy before you came—my temperament is naturally a happy one; but the joy I felt in your presence, in your apparent regard, was greater than any joy I had known before in my life."

"Then, Dorothy, dear, dearest, it is all right!" exclaimed the young man. "Take my hand, forget your apprehensions; they are doubtless of no consequence. Say you will be my wife, and all the scruples that exist in your breast I promise to banish."

"You can never banish them," replied Dorothy. "I will tell you quite simply the facts of the case. When I was quite a young girl my mother took me to see Dr. Digby. He said I was delicate. I did not quite know what was the matter, but I saw anxiety on my mother's face, and I knew by my father's tone that he feared something when he looked at me."

"Dr. Digby was most kind. He went with us the first time we went to the Engadine—he was my physician both morally and physically; I grew strong in mind as well as in body under his care. I came back, I felt well—very well. No girl ever looked out at life with brighter eyes. I went again to the Engadine, and again came back in perfect health."

I remained well all during the summer of this year. I met you. It became apparent to me that you did like me beyond the liking you would give to an ordinary girl. I was glad; my heart was full of joy. Do you remember that picnic on the Thames? You were there. I think it was my last really happy day. You know what happened that evening; the awful carriage accident, and the death of our—our very best and dearest friend. I got a shock when he died; it seemed to me as if a part of my vitality went away. The old, weary, tired feeling came back—I struggled against it, but struggling only made it worse. I used to wake up at night and think, at first with a sort of pleasure—I can send for Dr. Digby in the morning, he will soon put me right. Then I remembered that he was dead—there was no one else to turn to. I cried myself back to sleep, and got up good for nothing.

“We went away when the season was over, and I got better, but I have never been quite well since. I try to hide it from my mother and my father, but I am not really quite well now. Mr. Crichton, I know at last the name of the thing that ails me. Let me say it low—it is a terrible word—I shall die of consumption. That terrible malady is in my system; it will develop, for the one man who could cure it, or at least keep it at bay, is in his grave. Mr. Crichton, you do not want to marry a consumptive wife; if you did, if you wished it a thousandfold, I should still say, No. I love you; that is why I wish to save you from such a fate.”

While Dorothy was speaking, Crichton's sallow face turned one or two shades paler. He had always heard of Miss Sharpe's delicacy. He knew that she was more cared for, more wrapped round with tenderness and consideration, than fell to the lot of most girls. He did not trouble himself greatly with regard to the rumors which reached him; on the contrary, he loved Dorothy more for that fragile loveliness, that etherealness, which was one of her charms. He thought with delight of the time when he should shelter her from the roughest winds—he imagined her growing strong, really strong, under his care. Now his heart beat heavily. He loved Dorothy more than anyone else in the world; but to marry a consumptive wife, to transmit that terrible scourge to his children, were things which moved him. He did not reply for a moment, then he said with agitation:

“I can see you are not strong; I have always known that. There is no accounting for the fancies that people take when

their health is weak. I do not believe that you are consumptive—why should you say the horrible word?—you do not look like it.”

“Don’t I?” said Dorothy, glancing at him.

The very expression of her face gave him a pang. In her face, now that his eyes were opened, he saw symptoms of the disease which fills its victims with a strange, unearthly beauty: the fragile, slightly willowy figure, the clear blue veins which showed through the white skin, the beautiful, too bright color on the cheeks, the too radiant light in the eyes. Crichton turned away.

“You would not wish to marry a consumptive wife,” said Dorothy; “I hear it in your voice—I see it in your face. The matter is settled. We are friends, the best of friends. I thank you for all you have said to me; I thank you still more for the feelings which I know exist in your heart toward me. Let us be good friends while I live, and let me help you to choose another wife.”

“By Jove, no, you shan’t do that!” said Crichton. “See here, Miss Sharpe, your words have given me a blow. I know something of the scourge of consumption. I frankly admit that consumptive people ought not to marry; but there’s something else I won’t admit, and that is that the seeds of consumption lurk in your frame. You say that you were supposed to be stricken with it when you were a very young girl?”

“Yes, I was scarcely fifteen when we first went to the Engadine.”

“How many years ago is that?”

“Seven years.”

Crichton laughed in a relieved manner.

“Even Digby could scarcely keep consumption at bay for seven years,” he said. “I do not believe in your fears.”

“Do not people live as long as that when they have consumption?” asked Dorothy.

“In some cases people live for a long time, but yours is not the true history of the complaint. They do not get perfectly well for years and years. I believe you have made a mistake. Did anyone absolutely tell you that you were consumptive?”

“No one told me. It was carefully hidden from me, but I once had my suspicions. This summer, when I felt weak and tired again, I came across an old medical book, and I read a paper on tubercular disease. I guessed at once by my own

symptoms that this was the terrible complaint with which I was threatened. I longed to ask my mother, but I refrained."

"I don't believe you have consumption," said Crichton. "You are weak and depressed; you have gone through great sorrow; your imagination runs away with you."

"You can ask my mother; she will tell you the truth."

"I will, if you wish it; in the meantime there is something more important to discuss. Suppose you are free from this complaint, will you be my wife?"

"If a physician tells me that I am quite free from consumption, I will marry you," answered Dorothy.

She put her slender hands in his as she spoke. He drew her to his side and kissed her.

"We will hope for the best," he said. He glanced into her face. "You look better already. You are only nervous. I do firmly believe that nervousness can simulate anything. When you are married to me, I shall have you the strongest and happiest woman in London."

Crichton went away after a time, and Dorothy returned to her mother.

"Mother," she said at once, "Mr. Crichton has asked me to be his wife."

Lady Sharpe went up to her daughter, put her arms round her, and kissed her.

"I know what your answer must have been, Dolly," she said. "There is no better fellow in the world than Frank Crichton, and you love him, my darling. I have seen your secret in your face."

"I do love him, mother."

"You have promised to marry him?"

"Conditionally."

Dorothy sat down. She pressed her hand for a moment to her side.

"Have you a pain?" asked Lady Sharpe. "Do you feel ill?"

"Nothing to speak of. Just that horrid, tired, dragged sort of feeling. I suppose I have been excited, and this is the reaction. It is nothing. Mother, I want to ask you a question."

"Yes, my darling; and you will also tell me why you have not absolutely accepted Frank?"

"I will to-morrow or the next day. Mother, I want to ask you where Cecilia Digby is at present. You told me once that you had her address."

"You want to see her?"

"Yes, I want to see her badly."

"I can tell you where she is to be found. She is living in a small house in the country, near High Barnet. Shall we ask her to come up and spend a day with us? Poor Cecilia! She begged of me not to come to her yet, but if you really want her, Dorothy——"

"I do want her, mother; but I would rather go to her, if you don't mind."

"I will go with you, then, darling. Shall we send her a telegram, and ask her to expect us to-morrow?"

"I should like best to go alone, mother dearest. I can take Palmer with me, you know."

"Well, my darling, you shall have your wish. I don't like the expression on your face, Dolly. You seem overanxious; there is something troubling you, and you won't tell it to your mother."

"I will after I have seen Cecilia. I have just a little dread lurking in my heart. I have a wish to confide in Cecilia. When I come back my fear may have vanished—if so, where is the use of talking about it. If it vanishes, if she can set my heart at rest, oh, mother, mother, what a happy girl I shall be!"

"Shall I tell your father about Mr. Crichton's proposal, Dorothy?"

"I have asked Frank not to speak to father yet. The chances are equal, perhaps more than equal, that I shall not be able to accept him. There is no use in worrying my father unnecessarily."

"Well, dearest, it must be as you wish. Shall I telegraph to Mrs. Digby, and tell her to expect you?"

"Please do, mother. Say that if fine I shall be with her in the morning."

Lady Sharpe sent off the telegram, and in course of time an answer was received.

Cecilia would be delighted to see Dorothy.

The next day proved cloudless and lovely, and Miss Sharpe, accompanied by her maid, went down to High Barnet. Cecilia was waiting on the platform to receive her friend,

They kissed each other gravely—they had not met since Digby's death—then they walked back to Cecilia's small house almost in silence.

"You don't look well, Dorothy," said Cecilia, when they were alone. "You are much thinner than you used to be."

"Yes, that is just it," said Dorothy, clasping and unclasping her hands. "I will tell you everything quite simply, and then you shall advise me. I know that your husband told you many things with regard to the profession which the wives of doctors do not ordinarily know."

"I took such a vast interest in the subject," said Cecilia. "I often fear I worried Laurence with questions."

"Cecilia, did you ever ask him anything with regard to consumptive cases?"

"Why do you ask me?" replied Cecilia, starting and coloring brightly.

"I have a fancy, a hope, that you did so, for I know that Dr. Digby made consumption his specialty."

"He was much interested in that class of disease," answered Cecilia.

"I know he was. It was through his great skill that I was cured long ago."

"He was always proud of you, Dorothy. Why do you turn so pale, dear?"

"I will tell you now why I have come to you, Cecil. Cecil, I am in trouble; my heart is full; let me put my head on your shoulder and cry for a minute or two."

Cecilia stretched out her arms, drew the slight, childish creature into them, and pressed her to her heart.

"I kiss you as I would Nance," she said; "sometimes I look upon you as my grown-up child."

"And I love you. It comforts me to talk to you. Dear Cecil, you have gone through awful sorrow since I saw you last."

"We won't talk of it, dear. It lies heavy within me. Sometimes it seems to slumber—we won't wake it. I have terrible moments when it wakes. Now, let us talk about your worries. Dorothy, you always seemed as if trouble could not touch you. What is the matter? Tell me."

"I can tell you in a few words. Your husband's death was the first real sorrow that came to me. It seems to have brought others in its train. You know Mr. Crichton?"

"Of course—he has taken our old house."

"Yes; he wants me to go and live with him in that home. Do you mind? If it ever came to pass, could you bear the thought?"

"Could I bear it, Dorothy? I should love you to be there! Let me kiss you, let me congratulate you. Surely this is no trouble, my love? Laurence often spoke to me about Mr. Crichton—he thought most highly of him."

"I am glad of that," said Dorothy. "I have guessed as much. Yes, I know Frank—Mr. Crichton—is very good, very worthy. I——"

"Say at once that you love him with your whole heart, Dolly. Why should you be ashamed? Why should you mince matters? and, above all, why should you look at me with such a world of trouble in your face, and talk of fresh sorrow which has come to you at such a moment as this?"

"Perhaps you can set my heart at rest," replied Dorothy. "I will admit to you that at the present moment I am full of apprehension—I tremble, I fear. I long for the happy life which seems to open before me, I long for the cup of joy which almost touches my lips."

"Dearest Dorothy, if Laurence were alive, and if he could see you to-day, he would say that you were overnervous, that you are slightly hysterical. He would speak of your present condition as the reverse of healthy."

"I don't think he would, Cecilia. Your husband never made light of a real trouble. I am not hysterical, my sorrow is all too real. Now, to come to the point, did Dr. Digby ever tell you in the old days the nature of the illness with which I was threatened? You must be frank with me. You must tell me the truth. I——"

"I will tell you the simple truth. He thought you were threatened with consumption; he was much pleased afterward to discover that the amount of mischief in your lungs was arrested, practically cured."

"Yes, yes. He said that, did he? He said that I was cured?"

"He said that the disease was arrested."

"Did he ever say it was likely to spring into life again, Cecilia?"

"I cannot recall his making use of those words."

"You are hiding something from me. What was his impression?"

"I cannot tell you; he always spoke of you with great pleasure. The thought of your case gave him comfort even in his darkest moments."

"I have not been so well lately. If he were here and could sound my lungs to-day, I doubt if he would find them free from disease. The old weariness has come back, my side aches often, I cough, at night I am feverish. At times I feel quite well again, but at other times I scarcely care to live. Cecilia, even in the old days I hadn't such a distaste for life as I have now."

"But not when you think of Mr. Crichton," said Cecilia. "When you remember what love—real, earnest love—means you must wish to live, Dorothy."

"Yes, but my body remains tired; it is tired now."

"Do you really care very much for Mr. Crichton?" asked Mrs. Digby.

"I love him," repeated Dorothy, "but I have made up my mind. If there is the least chance of my dying of consumption, I will never be his wife."

While Dorothy was speaking, Mrs. Digby's face underwent a queer change. She moved away from the frail girl, who had been half leaning against her, and surveyed her sorrowfully from head to foot.

Dorothy's whole attitude was one of broken-down dejection. The light had gone out of her speaking eyes, the color had faded from her cheeks. The absence of color and light brought out marked hollows in the young face, the blue veins were too visible even for beauty.

Cecilia felt a pang like a sword going through her as she watched the young girl. What would Laurence say if he saw his favorite patient now?

"Why don't you speak, Cecilia?" questioned Dorothy. "Why do you look at me in that queer way?"

"I was thinking about you, darling. Dorothy, if you are really consumptive, you do right not to marry."

"Yes. It is sometimes very difficult to do right."

"It is. The present pain is very severe, but that pain is nothing, *nothing* to the pain that follows a mistake, even a mistake made unwillingly. Suppose, Dorothy, that you marry, and have children of your own—that contingency has to be faced—you, their mother, may sow within them the seeds of death. That is a very horrible knowledge—it comes to some people—don't let us talk of it any more. Lunch is ready in

the other room. You look ready to drop with fatigue ; come and eat."

"Not yet ; I have another thing to say. Your husband thought he had cured me ?"

"No ; there you are mistaken. He thought the disease was arrested. To arrest the progress of a living thing is different from killing it out and out."

"You yourself think it will revive ?"

"I ? I don't think ; I'm not a doctor."

"I may be mistaken in my sensations, Cecilia. Frank Crichton says I am nervous. What I feel may simply be due to nervousness."

"You don't look well, dearest Dolly."

"I came to ask you a question, and you have answered it. In case your answer was what I dreaded, I had a further favor to ask."

"Ask it, dear. I am but too ready to grant."

"Now that your husband has left us, who is the best doctor for diseases of the lungs ?"

"Laurence always consulted with Dr. Arbuthnot, in Hanover Square."

"I should like to see him."

"Yes, it would be wise of you to go. He is clever and kind. My husband thought most highly of him. Get Lady Sharpe to take you at once, Dorothy."

"That is just the point. I don't want my mother to take me. I want to go with you. *Will* you come with me ?"

"Your mother is the right person, Dolly."

"No, she isn't. You make a vast mistake. My dear, sweet, good mother is overanxious about me. Her anxieties have redoubled since your husband's death. I never cough that I do not feel as if I was running a nail into her coffin. Sometimes, much as I love her, I have an insane desire to run away from her in order to have the luxury of crying and wringing my hands and bewailing myself in secret. It is awful to have to suppress every groan and ache, and yet I must always do so in my mother's presence, for I see by the suffering in her eyes what she is enduring. I may be quite as well as when your husband died, Cecilia, and in that case what is the use of troubling mother ?"

"Very well, Dorothy, I will go with you to Dr. Arbuthnot."

"How sweet and dear of you ! I knew you would. May

I stay here to-night? I will send Palmer home; she can take a letter to mother. I can write the sort of letter that will make my mother quite glad to let me stay with you. Then we can go to Dr. Arbuthnot's to-morrow morning."

"Very well."

"Thank you, thank you. That is a load off my heart already. I feel quite well and young and hungry once more. Where is Nance? May I run and find her? And where is Henny-Penny? This is a dear, old-fashioned, little house, Cecilia. Don't you like it very much? Oh, who is that queer old woman who has just passed the window?"

"That is Miss Timmins. I must introduce you to her. You call her queer, but that uncouth frame happens to be the tabernacle which holds an angel. Now, before we talk any more, I must insist upon your coming in to lunch."

CHAPTER IV.

THE OLD SCHOOL OF MEDICINE.

DOROTHY'S programme was carried out almost to the letter. She spent the night with Cecilia, and the next morning the two went together to see Dr. Arbuthnot. He was an old man, Digby's senior by quite twenty years. He had known Mrs. Digby slightly in her husband's lifetime, and took a special interest now in the young patient whom she brought to see him.

Dr. Arbuthnot's manners were very cheerful, and Dorothy felt a degree of courage and hope while he talked to her.

"You must eat plenty, laugh plenty, and get all the sunshine you can," he said after he had examined her lungs. "I suppose your father and mother mean to take you abroad this winter?"

"I don't know. We were at Davos Platz the year before last."

"Ah, I don't quite approve of that cold rarefied air. It does good in some cases, but there is always a risk. The right place for you is the Riviera. By the way, can I see your mother?"

Dorothy turned pale, her lips trembled.

"You have not told me yet if my lungs are affected," she asked, in a faltering voice.

"Oh, pooh! Nothing to make a fuss over. The left lung might be a little sounder, but if you obey directions you have

nothing to apprehend. I should like to talk the matter over with your mother?"

"I don't want my mother to be made anxious. I am her only child."

"Well, your father will do. I know Sir Probyn well by name. He's safe to get the next judgeship. A word with him just with regard to your treatment."

"My father is just as anxious as my mother."

"I see you are a good, brave little girl, but there is really no occasion for anyone to be anxious. I make a rule of never telling patients how they are to treat themselves, and I merely wish to see your father or your mother in order to discuss the best place for you to winter in. What is the matter?"

"Cecilia, will you see Dr. Arbuthnot by himself?" asked Dorothy, in a choked voice. She rushed to the door, opened it, and went out.

The physician turned to Mrs. Digby.

"Your little friend is highly nervous," he said. "Why is she so anxious to conceal her state from her parents?"

"They worry her with overanxiety, as it is," answered Cecilia. "She is their only child. I believe they lost all their others through the cause which now threatens Dorothy's life."

"How do you know what threatens her life?"

"My husband has spoken to me of her—I know she is, or was, consumptive."

"Your husband talked to you about his patients? Rather an uncommon proceeding. Well, you sympathized with him; I can see that by your face."

"I sympathized with my husband with all my heart, and soul, and strength," answered Cecilia, in a solemn voice.

She stood upright, holding the back of a chair with one of her slender hands. Dr. Arbuthnot gave her one of his lightning glances. He was a very shrewd observer of character, and he saw directly that Mrs. Digby had intellect and courage above the average woman.

"You are very fond of that little girl," he said.

"Yes, I love her," replied Cecilia; "she is sweet, and she is brave. She wishes to conceal the truth from her parents, but at the same time it is necessary for her to know the truth."

"I do not agree with you; it would be the worst thing in the world for her to know the truth."

"She is all but engaged to be married," continued Cecilia. "She waits for your verdict to decide whether to accept the man she loves or not."

"Poor child!" replied the physician; "she certainly is in no state for marriage. I could not counsel it for a minute. I am sorry for this fact, as it lessens her chance of life. It will affect her spirits, and the malady will then make more rapid progress. Poor thing! of course, it would do her, personally, no harm to marry, but in such a case we have to think of others. I do not approve of consumptive people bringing children into the world; it is absolutely wrong."

"You have not yet told me what you think of her case," said Cecilia.

"There is a considerable patch of tubercle on the left lung, and the right is not free from disease. She had better go to the Riviera without delay."

"My husband sent her to the Engadine. The rarefied air had a very beneficial effect upon her. He spoke to me of her often. He said how satisfied he was with the effect of the cold treatment on Dorothy's lungs. He said that the patch of tubercle she had when he first examined her had absolutely dried up."

"Yes, yes, doubtless." Dr. Arbuthnot rose from his chair. "Your husband had, let us call them, advanced views, Mrs. Digby. I do not deny that cold air in high latitudes has effected cures, but I believe the cures to be fewer than the cases of patients who have received injury from so severe a treatment."

"My husband said——"

"Yes; Digby was a very clever man; I had the highest possible respect for him. He made consumption his specialty, but I am bound to say that, although we always agreed in diagnosis, when it came to treatment we widely differed. I am an old man, and the old ideas are sufficient for me. I could not possibly advise Miss Sharpe to go to the Engadine in the present state of her health. If she goes to Spain, or Egypt, or the Riviera, she may live for a long time."

"Is she likely to recover?"

"Never. Quite impossible. I am sorry to give you so dismal a verdict, but you must make the best of it when speaking to your young friend. There is no need at present to alarm her. I mean by this that no immediate danger may be apprehended. If she lives abroad she may continue to

exist for several years. I would not give her six months in this country. It would be best for me to see her parents."

"I do not think she wishes it. She particularly wanted to come to you alone with me. She loves her mother and father dearly, but you can understand that their overanxiety helps to depress her."

"I can understand it perfectly. Good-by, Mrs. Digby. If I can do anything for you at any time, pray command me."

Cecilia went away, and she and Dorothy got into a hansom together.

"You have not told me yet what he said," asked Dorothy, turning her white face toward her friend.

"First of all, Dolly, where are we to drive to? Your mother's house, or where?"

"Not home yet," she answered, almost fretfully. "Tell the driver to take us into the park—anywhere. Take the cab by the hour. I feel as if I should stifle. My heart beats so hard I think it will burst. Cecilia, I know by your face that you have bad tidings."

Cecilia opened the little trap door in the roof of the hansom, and gave some directions to the cabman; then she turned to Dorothy.

"Dear Dolly," she said, in her gentlest voice, "you told me yesterday that life was a weariness."

"Sometimes, but not at this moment. See how brightly the sun shines; notice how lovely the world looks. I do want to live at this moment. The grave is dark; I don't wish to go into it. I know you have bad news for me, and perhaps I shall be resigned in time."

"The doctor does think badly of you, Dorothy; he confirms your own opinion of yourself."

"Did you tell him I was half engaged to be married? I hope you did."

"I did. I mentioned no name, of course, but I stated the fact."

"And what did he say?"

Cecilia shook her head.

"What could he say, Dorothy?"

"I know, I know," answered the poor girl. Tears filled her eyes, and rolled down her cheeks.

"Poor Frank!" she said, after a pause. "Poor father and mother! Yes, I will try and bear up. I will try and re-

member the words your husband used to say to me. I used now and then—very seldom—to get fits of despondency that first time we went to the Engadine. I remember his asking me about it one day, and I said, ‘I feel ill, and I am afraid of death.’ He took my two hands in one of his big ones, and he looked into my eyes, and he said, ‘It is my firm conviction that death, when it comes, will be found more beautiful than life. When the veil is torn aside we shall be satisfied. Here, in our most joyful moments, we are never satisfied.’”

“I am glad you told me of those words, Dorothy,” answered Cecilia. “I will treasure them ; they will comfort my own heart. Now, Dolly, you must try and cheer up, you must try hard to be brave ; Dr. Arbuthnot gave no hope of your being able to marry, but——”

“Why do you say *but*, Cecilia ? Have you any hope—have you the shadow of a hope regarding me ?”

“I don’t know, I don’t know ! Don’t ask me. In the meantime, you are in no present danger—you may even live for years, but the doctor wishes you to go abroad. You are not to be in England except in fine weather. He would like you to spend a very short time in England. He wishes you to go to the Riviera.”

“I hate the Riviera—I know it isn’t the right place for me. I went there as a little child. I was ill, nervous, and miserable ; I could never sleep at night, and my heart always beat too fast. I am convinced that the Riviera is not the right place for me.”

“My husband never thought it the right place for you, Dorothy.”

“Then I won’t go. I don’t care if fifty Dr. Arbuthnots order me there. After all, I only went to him for an opinion : I need not be guided by his advice.”

“You must see some doctor, Dorothy ; you cannot possibly continue in your present state without treatment. I think it is only right that you should tell your father and mother that you went to Dr. Arbuthnot. In short, it is your duty to put your case into the hands of your parents.”

“I will not,” answered the girl fretfully. “They worry me. Cecilia, I wish I might live with you.”

“I should like to have you with me, but your father and mother——”

“I love them with all my heart, but I wish they would hold

me with a lighter clasp. Sometimes I feel their love almost selfish. There, I cannot speak of this at the present moment. Frank is coming to see me; what answer shall I give him? Cecilia, you have a queer look on your face. Do you know that it reminds me of something?"

"Of what, my love?"

"Of a little conversation I overheard many years ago. Dr. Phillips had come in to see my mother. He spoke of your husband. I was in the inner drawing room—neither my mother nor the doctor thought I could possibly hear. I was a naughty little girl. I knew they were talking of me, and I strained my ears. I had sharp hearing and I caught a good many words. What is the matter, Cecil?"

"Nothing, Dorothy. Go on, tell me your story."

"They spoke of Dr. Digby; it was the first time I had ever heard his name mentioned. I heard Dr. Phillips say distinctly, '*It is my undoubted belief that he holds in his hands an infallible cure.*' An infallible cure! Oh, the hope that filled my mother's eyes! 'An infallible cure,' repeated Dr. Phillips. 'For some reason he keeps it dark for the present, but that it exists I am absolutely certain. You had better go and see him to-morrow, Lady Sharpe.' Then my mother said, 'Shall I take Dorothy?' and Dr. Phillips said, 'Yes, by all means—by all means.' He went away, and mother took me to see your husband. Do you remember opening the door for us, Cecil? How pretty you looked, and how proud, and how stupidly you tried to hide your white hands under your apron. I noticed your hands and so did mother. Well, well, the infallible cure didn't exist: Dr. Phillips told an untruth. What is the matter, Cecil? You still have that very queer look on your face. Is there a cure—a cure for consumption? Do you know anything of it?"

"My darling, do you not think that if there was Laurence would have tried it in your case?"

"I don't know. He might have been afraid."

"A good physician is never afraid to use a certain and safe remedy."

"The remedy might be uncertain and not quite safe, then good physicians would hesitate."

"What do you mean, Dorothy?"

"I mean that the remedy might be of great value in some cases, but not in all. Oh! how you excite me, Cecilia. You must, you shall, tell me the truth. Did your husband dis-

cover anything? Was there a shadow of truth in Dr. Phillips's words?"

"I dare not answer you; at least not now, not at once; I must go home and think."

"You will write to me—you will write soon?"

"I may never write to you on this subject."

"I see by your face that Dr. Phillips was not altogether wrong."

"I admit nothing, Dorothy. You must go home now. God help you, poor darling!"

"Cecilia, I will not enter my mother's house until I wring a promise from you. You may take a week to think over it, but you must, you *shall*, tell me if your husband made a discovery, even a partial discovery, toward a cure for consumption. You have no right to keep me in the dark. I am weak and frail. My spirit is strong enough, but my body is very weak. It seems to me that when I say good-by to Frank to-day the sun will set. How can any poor creature live without the sun? Cecilia, if there is even a ghost of a hope you ought to let me know."

"Dorothy, your words perplex and agitate me. I will write or come to see you in a day or two. I can say nothing further—nothing further now."

CHAPTER V.

A LIVING SECRET.

CECILIA took the next train to High Barnet. Nance was waiting for her mother at the station. She stood on the platform, tall and slim, not holding Henny-Penny's hand, but erect, her bright eyes watching each carriage as the train rushed past her, slackened speed, paused, and then stopped. Her long hair lay in heavy masses down her back. When she saw her mother, her lips broke into a glad cry. She rushed to her, linked her hand in her arm, and began to pour forth her usual eager babble of pretty nothings, and childish chatter.

No, she had not been dreadfully lonely. Miss Timmins had been nice and had told her stories, and a lot of fresh seeds had come up in the garden, and Jones, the man who came once a week to do odd jobs, had shown her how to take cuttings, and then some kittens had arrived, and this event in itself was most exciting. The day had not been at all long; but, of

course, Nance was delighted to have her mother back again.

"You seem to be fast recovering your spirits, darling," said Cecilia, almost in a tone of reproach, for she had by no means herself risen above the morbidness which makes her think it wrong to be cheerful.

"Fast recovering my spirits, mother?" repeated Nance. "My spirits are all right. I'm awfully happy." She raised her lovely gray eyes to her mother's face with a swift, strong, tender glance which reminded Cecilia of Digby. The look on the child's face exasperated, delighted, and yet half maddened the overtired woman.

"I thought you would remember your father," she said with a cruelty she did not mean.

"I never forget him, mother," replied the child. "When he went away he told me to be brave. To be really brave I must feel happy. Father's awfully happy himself, I know, and so am I."

"Kiss me, Nance," said Cecilia.

She clasped the slender little figure to her breast. Her embrace was passionate and full of pain. She said no more until they got home.

Miss Timmins was standing in the little ivy-covered porch to welcome the mother and child back. She had a great insight into character, and could read faces with more comprehension than many people can read books. She saw at a glance that there was a change in Mrs. Digby. Since her husband's death, Cecilia had lived in a sort of uniform, monotonous, dead calm. For some reason she had got into stormy waters to-night; her expression was almost irritable. It was with difficulty that she could listen to the light chit-chat which Nance and old Abigail kept up between them.

Cecilia was not interested in the new kitten's name, and her "Very pretty—very pretty," when Nance begged her to admire its tortoise-shell coat, had no meaning in it.

After supper Nance went to bed, and Cecilia told Miss Timmins that she was going into her private sitting room and might sit up for some time.

"You look very tired, my love," said the old lady.

"I have done nothing really to tire me," she answered. "To run up to town and back was a mere bagatelle."

"What did the doctor say of that sweet, pretty girl?"

"He thinks badly of her, Aunt Abigail. Please don't ask me any further questions."

Miss Timmins refrained, and Cecilia locked herself into her sitting room.

The nights were getting chilly now, but she did not feel cold. She lit a lamp, and placing it on her husband's secretary, which was the one substantial piece of furniture in the room, sat down before it. Her hands trembled, her head reeled. She felt weak, depressed, and yet she had a queer, desperate sensation, more dominant than either the weakness or depression.

Yielding to this strange, overmastering feeling, she put her hand into her pocket, took out her bunch of keys, and fitting one into the small top left-hand drawer, slowly turned the key in the lock, and pulled it open.

The drawer contained one possession—a sealed packet.

Cecilia took the packet out of the drawer, laid it on the secretary, and read a direction which she herself had inscribed on it:

“ARTHUR DICKINSON, Esq., M. D.,
“*Brook Street.*”

She read these words half a dozen times; they seemed to possess no meaning for her. She pushed the little parcel away from her at last, and regarded it with a steady, growing fear.

“What have I done?” she said to herself. “It is three months since I directed that parcel. It belongs to Dr. Dickinson—it is not mine. What is it doing in the drawer of my husband's secretary?”

She jumped up, and walked to the other end of the room.

It was a tiny room, and the bookshelves, which nearly covered the walls, were well filled with books. They were almost all medical books, and some of them of great value. Cecilia took a large volume down now, and began to read; it was a medical dictionary, and instinctively she turned to an exhaustive paper on tubercular disease.

She read it through. Leaning the book on the mantelpiece, and standing by it, she devoured the pages. While she read, her pale, somewhat worn face became illuminated with a fine intelligence. Her eyes grew dark with the thought that filled them. The ideas and knowledge of the master who had written the articles were absorbed with fierce rapidity by a too receptive brain.

Digby's eyes must often have traveled over this article, for it was heavily scored in many parts, and notes in his legible hand were also inscribed on the margins.

Cecilia read the long paper to its end ; then, shutting the book, she clasped her hands, and began to pace up and down the small room.

"Oh !" she exclaimed aloud, and with passion, "if only my husband had lived to perfect his discovery, what a different world it would now be ! Dorothy's heart would not break—she, with tens of thousands of other victims, would not have to go out of the sunshine of life into the dark, dread shadow of death. O Laurence ! why did you ever do anything else all your life but try to perfect the idea which was surely sent to you from heaven ?"

Cecilia stood still in her rapid walk. She pressed her hand to her fast beating heart.

"I have felt dead since the day my husband was taken from me," she murmured ; "but I awoke to new life in that consulting room to-day. Oh, that man's crass stupidity ! His satisfaction with himself ! His calm verdict on a young life ! His sublime determination to ignore all newer lights, to live on contentedly in his mediæval darkness ! I despise him—I could scarcely tolerate him. He said that he and my husband agreed as to diagnosis, but differed with regard to treatment. *Differed !* of course they widely differed. But Laurence is in his grave, and Dorothy must be guided by the man whose ideas are twenty years behind his time. She must go to the Riviera, though I know, and she knows, that the climate will either kill her or drive her mad. Oh, if my husband were alive ! His favorite patient, too ! The very expression which I saw on her dear, beautiful, pathetic face to-day would have roused such a spirit in him that he would have worked at this discovery until he could proclaim it in triumph to a rejoicing, emancipated world."

Cecilia began to pace the room again. At last she paused before the secretary.

"I am glad that I did not burn those papers," she said. "Heaven prevented me. I wonder what sort of a man Dr. Dickinson is. If he has a spark of spirit in him, if he has any love for true scientific research, if he has any love for a suffering world, what a treasure will lie in his grasp ! I must take this parcel to him to-morrow. Oh ! will he read it ? Will he rejoice ? Will he throw everything else aside for its sake ? Or, on the other hand, will he bury it in oblivion ? If I thought that——"

She sank down once more in her husband's chair.

"If I thought that," she repeated. She broke into a laugh, which was scarcely tuneful. Her face lost for the time its great tenderness of expression.

"I know what I will do!" she exclaimed. "I will read the papers myself before I take them to Dr. Dickinson. Laurence never forbade me to read them; and my heart will be more at rest if I judge for myself how incomplete the discovery really is."

It is the first step that costs. Cecilia's hands trembled much as they broke those seals, but when she had spread Digby's papers before her, and when her eyes began to devour the closely written pages, she ceased to feel either fear or nervousness. Every faculty became absorbed in what her mind was devouring. Emotion was held in abeyance. She read, she wondered, she rejoiced.

The different papers were arranged alphabetically. From the earliest thought to the moment when he could say that he had a real discovery in his grasp, Digby had made notes of his progress, step by step. Cecilia felt some of the sensations which had animated Phillips when he looked into the pocketbook long ago. She, too, read the words that had so filled James Phillips with wonder and desire.

"After various attempts have succeeded in obtaining a pure lymph. Have I in my hands the remedy for this terrible scourge?"

Cecilia read on. She knew her husband's handwriting well—it was as clear and as easily deciphered as print. She passed over the account of the experiment he had made on himself to read further notes.

"If, as I believe, tubercular disease is only hereditary in the sense that there is handed from parent to child a constitutional peculiarity which makes them, as it were, a suitable soil for the development of this poison, then, arguing from analogy, if I can alter the condition of the soil tubercular disease would have no effect. We see in disease acknowledged to be due to specific disease, that, having had the disease in ever so mild a way, those who have suffered do not again contract the same disease, or, at the worst, they only have it in a modified form."

Cecilia laid this paper aside to refer to by and by. She read another note half aloud.

"I have made experiments with this preparation. I have seen the results, and have found that afterward the injection of tubercular tissue itself has had no power to produce the

disease. *I have even seen this in my own case. Was it because the soil was originally unsuitable, or did I produce immunity by my remedy? Oh! that I dared conscientiously use it on my fellow-creatures—on those sufferers known to be afflicted with the disease, or even on those who have a tendency to it. Will a moment ever come when I may put this great question at rest?*”

“I can’t understand my husband’s reluctance,” murmured Cecilia; “he told me little, but these notes show me plainly that he used the remedy on himself with no bad results. Why should he have hesitated to make use of it in cases where the disease really existed? Oh! what a thing courage is—I should not have been afraid.” She blushed when she said this, and, taking up her handkerchief, wiped the moisture from her brow.

“If ever there was a man in all the world full of moral courage it was my husband,” she said to herself. “I have no right to think of my courage as greater than his. I know that his was infinitely the greater. He would not dare for the sake of the human race to venture on a cure that might act as a poison. Why does my brain swim? Why do my eyes almost refuse to see? O Dorothy, if I could cure you! According to Laurence’s notes, if I could employ this agency in Dorothy’s case she would not only be cured herself, but it would be impossible for her to transmit the disease to her children. If I could use this remedy, Dorothy would get well, and she might safely marry the man she loves. Of course, I can’t use it; what utter nonsense I am talking! I have Laurence’s plain directions. He said, ‘I charge you, Cecilia, not to let these papers get into the hands of that unscrupulous man, James Phillips.’ It didn’t occur to him to say further, ‘I charge you, above all things, not to let my remedy get into the hands of an ignorant woman, even though this woman be my own wife.’ Yes, Laurence, yes. I remember your charge. I won’t disobey. Dr. Dickinson shall have your valuable papers. It is all right, my dear husband. Fear nothing. You never forbade me to read your notes, however, and I must just once more dip into this subject to set my own mind at rest.”

Cecilia read still further.

“*The remedy does not seem specially dangerous. It did me no harm—that is, as far as I can tell—but what about those with the tendency to consumption already in them? Might I*

not sow the very disease I wish to avert? That is the question of questions. Shall I ever solve it? If I live, this is possible. When I can bring a great leisure and all the best powers of my mind to bear upon it, I will study this matter further."

Turning over the pages restlessly, she came upon another paragraph, which both puzzled and fascinated her.

Digby wrote as follows :

"I have arrived at a stage when I can inject the attenuated lymph into myself without injury; but here I am stranded—for I have no tendency to a tuberculous condition, and I find no possible method of trying the effects without risk on those for whom this remedy was intended.

"Would it be possible, by cultivating the lymph in different media—say, in starch and in gluten—and then by mixing the results, and again cultivating the mixture, to alter the chemical properties of my compound, and so obtain the desired panacea? By this, or some other method hidden in futurity, a safe and sure remedy will surely one day be found. Am I the man to discover it, or is it the work of another? Thy will be done, O God. But oh, to realize the hopes of all thinking scientific men, and give the world the greatest blessing which could be bestowed on it!"

These most valuable notes could scarcely be comprehended by their reader. She put them carefully aside, however, for further study, and then turned to some which absorbed every faculty of her mind—for they gave the fullest particulars with regard to the method by which the lymph, imperfect as Digby still considered it, was prepared.

The carefully written notes mentioned with the utmost minuteness how the fluid was obtained—by what process of cultivation it was brought to its present attenuated condition. Each important step in the process was faithfully recorded.

To Cecilia, whose ignorance made it impossible for her to see heaps of hidden difficulties, the whole idea seemed perfect and ready for use.

Digby's previous notes scarcely alarmed her; she was fully convinced that the remedy was perfect *now*, and that only an over-sense of conscientiousness prevented her husband using it long ago.

The means of attenuation, and the methods of cultivation were so accurately recorded that she felt as if she knew as much as her husband.

"He is dead, but his secret lives," she exclaimed; "his

secret lives. I have nothing further to read ; these papers don't belong to me ; they belong to Dr. Dickinson. I will take them to him. I will tell him boldly that I have read them. I will implore him, I will almost go on my knees to him, to give up his life to this great cause. If he refuses—ah ! good God, *if* he refuses ! If such a thing happens, I feel as if I must bring the papers away again. Can I possibly persuade this doctor to obtain the lymph, to develop, to attenuate it by Laurence's process, and then to try its effects on Dorothy. Dare I do this ? My head reels worse than ever ; I can think no more. I must go to bed."

Cecilia collected the papers, wrapped them in fresh foolscap paper, sealed and directed them anew. Then, after locking them into the drawer where her husband had always kept them, she went wearily upstairs to her own room.

Nance was fast asleep in her mother's bed. She always slept with her mother now, and many times at night Cecilia would clasp the child in her arms and feel that life was not all over with her as long as she kept this precious treasure.

Nance coughed once or twice in her sleep to-night ; there was a faint, a very faint, hectic color on her cheeks. Cecilia, stretching out her hands to clasp those of the sleeping child, found that they were wet with perspiration. Her heart stood still with a new fear. Suppose what her husband so dreaded was really coming to pass, and Nance, their only child, was beginning to develop those seeds of consumption which her mother had sown in her frame.

Cecilia went to sleep at last to dream vividly and uncomfortably. She passed the bounds of prudence and rectitude in these dreams. She felt something like an alchemist ; but she also knew herself in her dream to be engaged in a nobler quest than that of any alchemist who ever lived. She was seeking with might and main to wrest his prey from Death. The beautiful, the young, the gifted, the noble, she was saving from an early grave ; in short, having perfected her husband's discovery, she was using it for the benefit of mankind.

She awoke unrefreshed from this sleep. Her dream horrified her ; she shrank from it.

Nance, quite well now, awoke with the birds, and seeing her mother's eyes open, began to talk to her. She leant over and kissed Cecilia, and then laid her pretty head on her mother's breast.

"I was dreaming of father," said Nance; "I thought I was with him beyond the Golden Gates. We were having such an awfully jolly time. Shall I tell you about it?"

"No, no; not this morning," answered her mother.

Cecilia felt the unholy influence of her own dream in the very air. She could not talk of Digby to his child with the consciousness that even in her sleep she had wilfully disobeyed his dearest and strongest wish.

"I am going back to town again, Nance," she said.

"May I come with you, mother?"

"No, my love; town air is not good for you. You must stay at home. You must take a nice walk with Henny-Penny, and breathe as much country air as you can. You didn't seem quite well in your sleep, Nance."

"I was perfectly well, mother." Nance laughed a little, then she added, looking full into her mother's face: "It's you, mother, who are not well. Your face is pale, and yet it burns. Do you feel ill? Mother, I don't want you to go beyond the gates to father just yet."

"No, my dearest, I am going to stay with you. I have my work to do."

"What work?" asked the child.

"I can't tell you, my love." Cecilia laughed in the harsh way she had done in the study the night before. "I don't know that I have any special work to do unless it is to take great, great care of you, my little Nance."

"You always do that. Are you really going to town to-day?"

"Yes, Nance; I am going to see a doctor."

"Mother, then you must be ill!"

"No, darling; I am taking the doctor a message which father left for him."

"Father left a message for a doctor? Is it a present from father that you are taking to him?"

"That is it, Nance; a most valuable, precious, costly gift."

"Did father tell you to take it to the doctor at once, or to keep it for two or three months and then give it to him?"

Cecilia's brow contracted with pain.

"Father didn't name any time, Nance," she answered. "Get up now, my love, and I will follow you."

Henny-Penny came in and took Nance off for her bath,

Cecilia lay quiet a little longer, then she sprang up and prepared to dress. Her head was still giddy; she felt faint and queer. A sudden desire not to move took possession of her. She lay back on her pillows once more and closed her eyes.

This was the beginning of a short but rather sharp illness. In the course of the day the local doctor was sent for. He said that Mrs. Digby was feverish, and that there were certain symptoms which might lead to pneumonia unless special care were taken. Cecilia lay and heard the words, and her heart beat more rapidly than ever. She was really ill, almost in danger for a night or two, and during one of these long night watches she whispered something to Miss Timmins:

"If I die, Aunt Abigail——"

"Yes, my love, I am listening; not that you have the least intention of dying, but I am listening."

"If I die," continued Cecilia, "there is a parcel in the left-hand drawer of the secretary which does not belong to me; it is the property of Dr. Dickinson of Brook Street. Will you take it to him?"

"In the extremely unlikely event to which you allude occurring," replied Miss Timmins, "I will take the parcel to Dr. Dickinson. Is there any message to take with it?"

"I should like to write a letter to accompany the parcel; may I?"

"Not to-night, my love, you are a great deal too feverish; you may write to-morrow, if you will."

But on the morrow Cecilia was much better. The danger was completely arrested, the fever had left her. She did not write any letter, but lay in bed, hour after hour and day after day, thinking, always thinking of her husband's imperfect discovery.

One day a great impatience came over her. She must, she would, read those papers in that parcel once again. She asked to have a fire lit in her study, and tottering downstairs, weak and feeble, sat in the armchair by the fire and read Digby's notes from beginning to end, not once, but twice, three, many times. That special note which related to the preparation of the remedy, to the means which Digby had employed for obtaining the lymph and then perfecting it for use, she read so often that she literally knew it by heart.

Once more the parcel was sealed and put back into the drawer of the secretary, and Cecilia went back into her own room,

In a week or two she was nearly as well as ever, but she had a slight, a very slight cough, and one day when Dr. Hobart, the local doctor, called, she asked him if he would mind examining her lungs very carefully.

"You have just escaped pneumonia, but your lungs are all right now," he said.

"I think it only fair to tell you, Dr. Hobart, that my mother died of consumption."

"Well, well; you are not going to die of consumption."

"I earnestly hope not, but of course I have a tendency to the disease."

"That, unluckily, goes without saying," answered the doctor. "The children of consumptive parents invariably—I may say *without exception*—inherit the taint. It is a great pity, for consumption, when it once declares itself, cannot be cured, it can at best only be alleviated."

"Of course, I know that," replied Mrs. Digby. "Will you do me the favor of listening to my lungs very carefully, and telling me if, in your opinion, they are now perfectly healthy? In short, if, in your opinion, I have, at the present moment, not the slightest trace of tubercular disease?"

Dr. Hobart laughed.

"I will try and reassure your mind," he said. "When speaking with you I sometimes forget that your husband was a man of remarkable scientific knowledge. I overlook the fact that for many years you were the wife of one of the most brilliant doctors of the day."

"Why do you say that? How do I reveal my past history in my speech?"

"By making use of the word 'tubercular.' It is an expression we doctors do not expect to drop from the lips of ordinary patients."

"You perhaps forget," said Mrs. Digby, turning a little pale, "that my husband was a specialist—that he made tubercular disease his hobby?"

"I am scarcely likely to forget such a well known fact," returned Dr. Hobart. "There is not a man in the profession who was not aware of Digby's genius, and who did not envy him his very remarkable gifts. Now, let me listen to your lungs."

Dr. Hobart was young and fairly clever. After a brief examination he looked full at Mrs. Digby and hesitated.

"I want the truth," she said, fixing her eager eyes on his face.

"Of course you must have it," he replied. "You are not quite free from the taint. Your right lung is not absolutely clear, there is a want of elasticity in the apex, but the mischief is very slight at present. Must you live in this country for the winter?"

"I don't know. One thing keeps me in England."

"What is that?"

"I am poor; my means are extremely limited."

"You can live cheaply abroad. I should recommend you to go abroad."

"Time enough to think of that," said Cecilia impatiently. "The mischief is very slight at present, is it not?"

"Very, very slight. It has arisen from the bad cold from which you have only just recovered, and it is possible, just possible, that in a month or two I may be able to give you a different verdict. I should be almost sure of this but for what you have told me about your parentage."

"Thank you, Dr. Hobart. I am much obliged to you. I wished to know the truth, and you have told me."

"It is an awful pity," said Dr. Hobart, walking to the fireplace and standing with his back to it as he spoke, "that nothing has ever been done to arrest this tubercular formation. But I feel convinced that if anyone in the world could have discovered a cure for tuberculosis it would have been your husband, Mrs. Digby. As he lived and died without doing so, there is no use in lesser lights struggling to discover a remedy."

"No use whatever," said Cecilia in a cold voice.

The doctor wondered at her sudden change of manner; he shook hands with her and went away.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CURSE OF THE FATHERS.

HOPE springs eternal in the human breast. This is a truism confirmed by everyday experience. To each man and woman is given, among many hopes, one stronger, larger, more daring than the rest. It flits like a will-o'-the-wisp before the dazzled and longing eyes, now receding, growing pale, almost vanishing, now again looking large and brilliant on the horizon. One man's hope means one thing, his brother's the opposite. But for each, be he rich or poor,

clever or stupid, high or low, there always dangles before him, with more or less assurance on his part that he shall one day clasp it, that flickering, dazzling light, which, by its very nature, can never be held in a human hand.

When the will-o'-the-wisp recedes so far into the distance that the man can no longer follow it, he either takes up another hope or he dies. To live, in the full sense that life implies, without hope is practically impossible.

When Digby died and Cecilia went away, Phillips experienced that starved sensation of heart which people go through when their will-o'-the-wisp shows them his erratic, changing, and shifting character. Phillips was rich and fairly popular. He was envied by lots of people, and hated, which comes to much the same thing, by others. But the fact that he was hedged in by the good things of life by no means prevented his aspiring to what he was pleased to consider the better things. He was ambitious, he hoped to win fame. He knew himself quite well enough to be certain that he could never devise an original scheme, that he could never write an original book, that his diagnosis must be based on that of wiser men, that he must take his experiences secondhand.

He knew this fact perfectly well, he knew that the gods had been good to him on the whole, but none the less did he pine for that which was denied. He wanted to be talked over, to be praised, to be fussed about. He would have given half his wealth for half Digby's originality.

He made his plans with care, and every day it seemed to him more and more probable that he should win success. He hoped much from Cecilia; he thought himself a clever observer of character, and he believed that he could play any tune he liked on that sensitive heart of hers. He felt morally certain that he could work on Cecilia's fears, and get her to induce Digby to talk over his discovery with him. Once this was accomplished, he felt convinced that Digby would see his value, would make use both of his brains and his money, and then the great scientific discovery would be proclaimed to the world under the auspices of two proud names.

Digby died, and Phillips's will-o'-the-wisp seemed to vanish, never to return. But lo and behold! once more the dancing, bewildering light appeared; Phillips followed it over a sad quagmire of dishonor and moral cowardice. He all but grasped his treasure; again it was wrenched from his grasp.

For a time he literally abandoned hope, but as the weeks

wore on, the old thoughts and ideas returned to him, and he wondered what steps he could take to induce Cecilia to show him her husband's papers.

He had a certain fear of Cecilia now, for he was almost certain that she had read through his motive on the evening when she found him in her husband's consulting room.

He resolved, however, that his fears should not divert him from his desires. He thought it scarcely possible that a poor woman—and Cecilia was now very poor—could not be bought with gold. The only question was, how long the victim would take to yield, and how big the price he must pay for his victory.

Having made up his mind, he wished to lose no time in seeing Mrs. Digby, for he did not conceal from himself the knowledge of a grave danger which might happen every day. Cecilia might, in ignorance of their true value, burn all her husband's medical papers. This thought occurred to Phillips more than once, but, although it hastened his movements, it did not greatly terrify him; he had the greatest possible faith in Mrs. Digby's intellect, and he believed that only a thoroughly silly woman could commit such a sacrilege.

The autumn happened to be very fine that year. Month after month passed by without giving any trace of cold or winter. The leaves fell off the trees, it is true, and the days grew short, but the winds remained soft and balmy, and the late autumn flowers kept on blooming, unchecked by even a suspicion of frost.

It was the correct thing to call this lovely season unhealthy, but in town and country alike, people enjoyed it.

Cecilia had gone to her cottage in the middle of July. When the first three months were up, she took it for a longer period, and finally resolved to stay there altogether for the present.

On a certain warm and tranquil day in November, Phillips surprised his wife, as she was giving directions to her cook, by asking her to come and spend a day in the country with him.

"You haven't seen your cousin Cecilia for a long time, he said; "this is Saturday, and I don't expect any patients. Come and let us pay her a visit."

Helen started, and the color flew to her cheeks.

"I shall be delighted to go to Cecilia," she said. Her manner showed some slight hesitation. "You know perfectly

well, James, how fond I am of my cousin Cecilia, but the——”

“I have no time to listen to argument, Helen,” retorted Phillips. “The day is beautiful, and your cousin will be, or ought to be, charmed to see us. Get your directions over, my dear, and be ready to catch the 11.45 from King’s Cross.”

“Ought we not to send Cecilia a telegram? If we take that train, we shall arrive just at her lunch time. You know she has not a big house like ours, and she will not be ready for us.”

“Do you think Mrs. Digby would mind a trifle of that sort? There will be bread in the house, and butter, and perhaps cheese. Who cares for what they eat? Come, come, Helen, I look for the pleasure of taking your beautiful cousin by surprise.”

Helen said nothing further. She admired her beloved James as much as ever, but she felt that she was every day becoming more and more a tool in his hands. Before her marriage there had been a certain amount of individuality about her; that individuality had long ago been merged into his stronger and fiercer nature.

She said nothing further now, but having finished her housekeeping for the day, went upstairs and got ready for her visit.

Phillips and Helen caught the train to High Barnet; in due time they arrived at the little station, and about ten minutes later found themselves standing in the rustic porch that surrounded Cecilia’s present home. Nance was playing in the garden: she was the first to see them. She uttered a glad cry of rapture, kissed Helen many times, and then taking one of James Phillips’s hands between both her own, squeezed it ecstatically.

The best in Phillips once more leaped to the surface. He stooped down and kissed the child tenderly on her forehead.

“You have a look of your father, little one,” he said, and there was absolute feeling in his tone.

Cecilia came out to welcome her guests, and they all went into the queer little wainscoted drawing room, whence a buzz of eager conversation penetrated into the garden.

Cecilia was very glad to see Helen, and as she thought it absolutely impossible that Phillips could now do her any further harm, she allowed the antagonism she felt toward the

man to slumber, and did her utmost to give these two old friends a warm welcome.

Nance went into the garden to pick flowers. From the flower garden she proceeded to the kitchen garden, where she had an earnest conversation with Miss Timmins and also with old Jones, the rheumatic gardener. The best of everything must appear on the luncheon table—the choicest flowers must be cut, and the late pears picked from the tree; the russet apples must be polished up; nothing, in Nance's opinion, was too good or too rare to give to Helen and her husband.

"What a state of excitement you are in, child," said Miss Timmins almost crossly; "one would think the benefactors of the race had arrived suddenly by train, instead of——"

She stopped abruptly. Nance was giving her one of her full, earnest glances.

"I do not know what you mean by the benefactors of the race, Aunt Abigail," she said.

"Your father was one, child," said the old lady. "There, don't bother me; if you must have the best, you must. I hope that man won't make a fool of——"

"How funny you are, auntie. What can you mean?"

"Look here, Nancy, you are on no account to repeat my words."

"Of course I won't. I never tell tales."

"No, you are a good child; you are your father's good, brave little girl. Now, I am going to say something to you—I don't like that man!"

"What man?"

"That friend of yours, James Phillips."

Nance opened her eyes wide in astonishment.

"You don't agree with me, Nancy?" said Aunt Abigail. She was pulling the pears fiercely from the old pear tree as she spoke.

"Well, you see," replied Nance in her slow voice, "it isn't likely that I could. I love everybody, and most special I love Dr. Phillips. I love cousin Helen, too, but I love Dr. Phillips best. No, I won't ever tell what you said, Aunt Abigail. I am sorry that you can't see with my eyes, that's all."

She ran off, and Miss Timmins muttered more angry words to herself as she arranged the pears and apples for dessert.

The lunch was a success, and afterward Helen and Nance walked round the garden in company. This was Phillips's

opportunity. It was for a moment like this that he had given up a day in town, the possible chance of seeing patients, and the delights of an afternoon performance at one of the theaters.

The moment Helen and Nance left them together he turned to Cecilia, and said in a voice that implied a great deal :

"I have much I want to say to you. Can you contrive that we shall be uninterrupted for half an hour or so?"

Cecilia, who had quite recovered from the severe cold which had prostrated her in October, stood by the open drawing-room window.

"I have no excuse for not listening to you," she said, turning her bright, clear eyes full on his face. "You know perfectly well, however, that although we shall probably remain friends in the eyes of the world, in the eyes of your good wife, and my sweet child, yet our spirits are antagonistic."

"I deny that," retorted Phillips, "we have an immensity in common. If we quarrel it is only because we are so much alike."

"In my turn I deny that," said Cecilia. She spoke with such emphasis that Phillips could not help biting his lips with vexation.

"The afternoon is lovely. Shall we go for a walk?" he asked.

"That is just as you please. You and your wife are my guests. Helen and Nance are very happy going round the old-fashioned garden ; we may as well stand by this window as do anything else. Now, what have you got to say?"

"You often hear of Miss Sharpe, don't you?" Cecilia colored vividly when Phillips said this, and a troubled, uneasy look flitted over her face. She was Phillips's match in all respects, but she had not his power of keeping emotion out of her face. Her feelings, whether of pleasure or anger, were always reflected in her eyes, and trembled more or less round her lips.

"I do hear of Dorothy very often," she said. Her tone was absolutely guarded.

"Then you are prepared for sad news," said Phillips, still watching her intently. "Miss Sharpe is seriously ill."

"I know she is unwell."

"It is sad," continued Phillips, "it is really tragic. Everyone who knows anything about her knows, too, that your husband kept her alive. His care was unrelenting—he had such

good influence over her that mind acted on body, and the disease to which she is a victim remained quiescent under his management. There is little doubt, little doubt whatever, that it has now started into fresh activity. She is seriously unwell. I met Lady Sharpe only yesterday; she told me that not only was Dorothy ill, but that something else had occurred."

"What was that?" asked Cecilia. Her eagerness to know even got into her voice.

"She said," continued Phillips, "that Dorothy had got a queer crank in her mind, that she refused, positively refused, to leave England. All the physicians, and more than one have lately seen her, have agreed in ordering her to go abroad without delay. She declares that if she goes anywhere it will be to Davos Platz. In the present state of her health, Davos Platz would not suit her at all. The consequence is that she positively declares her intention of staying at home. The weather up to the present has been much in her favor, but let a chill come—let fogs visit London, or a touch of frost get into the air, and the mischief would be most serious. You ought to use your influence on her, Mrs. Digby. Your husband's mantle has fallen, to a great extent, on you. You ought to lose no time in advising Miss Sharpe not to sacrifice her life to a mere whim."

"I did not know of this," answered Cecilia. "I knew that Dorothy was not well, but I have not seen her for some months; I have been ill lately myself."

"Ill! I didn't know. Forgive me for saying that I never saw you look in better health."

"I am very well indeed, now." A proud yet troubled look filled Cecilia's eyes. "I believe myself," she continued, "to be in excellent health, but in October I had a touch of pneumonia."

"Good Heavens, you don't say so! Pneumonia in your case might be serious."

"Judging from my face, Dr. Phillips, do you believe my attack to have been serious?"

"No, you look the picture of health. Your complexion is clear, but not too clear; you are pale, of course, but then you never had much color."

"Enough. I am well; we won't discuss my peculiarities of appearance. Now to talk about Dorothy; your news has troubled me greatly, I must write to her."

"I am glad to hear you say that. One reason why I came

down here to-day was to tell you about her, for I felt absolutely certain that you would do your best for her."

"My best is very, very little ; still I must urge her to obey the doctors' orders."

"It is madness, doubtless, to go against the profession," retorted Phillips, with a slightly sardonic smile. "By the way, rumor tells us that Miss Sharpe's state of health is not altogether due to weakness of body—she has had an unfortunate love affair. The thing is no secret, Mrs. Digby, so you need not start. All the world knows that Frank Crichton is head over ears in love with her, and that she won't look at him."

"She could not marry him in her present state of health," said Cecilia, in a very low voice.

"Every lady would not be so scrupulous," replied Phillips. "Well, she has undoubtedly refused him, and he goes about with a shadow on his face. He is a right good fellow—clever, too. We constantly see him, now that he lives so close."

"I am truly sorry for them both," said Cecilia, clasping her hands; "the story is bitterly sad."

"It is sad," said Phillips, "yet not so sad as it might be. The saddest thing of all would have been this: Miss Sharpe, who has a very strong tendency to consumption, being less scrupulous than she is, would have said 'Yes' to Crichton's proposal. They would have married, and her health would doubtless have improved. For a time she would have enjoyed better health, but in a few years, when she was the mother of several children, she would have utterly broken down and died of rapid consumption. Her children would have inherited the disease. Think of the catastrophe. Crichton is well out of it. The disappointment of the present is nothing to the wholesale slaughter that would have taken place had Miss Sharpe been less conscientious."

"She could not have married, of course," said Cecilia, turning pale; "still I am sorry for her."

"You have reason to be sorry. She is a good and beautiful woman, and her days are numbered."

"Oh, don't say so !"

"My dear lady, surely you know enough about the course of tubercular disease to be well assured on that point. Dorothy Sharpe is not long for this world."

"Dr. Phillips, your news gives me terrible pain. What about her father and mother?"

Phillips shrugged his shoulders.

"You may well ask," he retorted; "they must bear the shock as other people have done before them. The taint which their child suffers from must have been in the blood of one, perhaps both, of them; they must answer for the consequences. It is one more illustration of the time-honored fact that the sins of the fathers are visited on the children."

"You cannot call consumption a sin."

"Well, no. We will diverge from the original text—the *curse* of the fathers is visited on the children. Mrs. Digby, you look pale. Are you cold? Is it wise to stand so long by this open window?"

"I will come out with you and take a walk," said Cecilia. "Your news gives me deep distress; I must walk off the impatience which overpowers me."

Cecilia put her head out of the window and called to Nance.

"Ask Cousin Helen if she would not like to take a walk," she cried; "there is a beautiful view from the top of the hill."

"Oh, mother! do let us go into the Hadley Woods," called back Nance's sweet, high, shrill tones.

Her gay laugh was also borne on the breeze. Cecilia went out, and bent over the child and kissed her.

"My sweet, my treasure!" she whispered low in her ears.

Helen and Nance walked on in front; Phillips still retained his position by Cecilia's side.

"Little Nance also looks well," he said. "You did right to leave London; the country air suits her. Of course, Mrs. Digby, I need not too strongly impress upon you the fact that the child's life is frail; you will probably have to take her to a warmer climate in a year or two."

"I will do everything that is possible for Nance," replied Cecilia; "but you forget, Dr. Phillips, that I am no longer a rich woman—my means are extremely limited."

"Oh! yes, yes, that grieves me. Nance is the sort of child who requires luxury—the softest living, the most unremitting care; she ought to winter in one place and spend her summers in another. As to her education, if she were my child, I should have her taught nothing."

"And there you would injure her," said Cecilia. "Her active brain must have food. No one knew that better than her father; she is too imaginative, and, if I may dare say such a thing, too tender-hearted. Her mind, as well as her body, needs any amount of bracing."

"Yes," returned Phillips, after a pause, "you are a wise mother ; you will doubtless do what is best for your child ; all the same, I wish you were better off."

"You are kind, but I have got enough money for my present needs."

"Your income does not reach £200 a year."

"That is a fact ; but when one's wants are few, expenses are proportionately small. As long as Nance is well the subject of money does not trouble me in the least."

"You would not refuse wealth, if it came in your way, for the child's sake ?"

"If it came in my way, but it isn't likely to."

"Will you listen to me without getting very angry ? I want to say something."

"I will listen to you ; I cannot possibly say that I shall not get angry."

"Feel as angry as you like in your heart, only listen to me to the end."

Cecilia quickened her footsteps ; she and Phillips now overtook Helen and Nance. Presently they got ahead of them, presently far ahead. When a considerable distance was put between Cecilia and her child, she turned and looked full at Phillips.

"You had better speak," she said. "I know by your manner that you are going to say something extremely distasteful, but it is out of my power to prevent your saying it."

"You always were a unique woman, Mrs. Digby. The proposal I have to make would not be distasteful to other people circumstanced as you are. I want to buy something from you at a price."

"Oh !" said Cecilia, the color flashing into her face, the old loveliness gleaming in her eyes, and giving her that fleeting fascination which no one could see unmoved. "I may as well tell you at once that I have nothing to sell ; you have come to the wrong market."

"Excuse me, you have something to sell. I will buy your husband's medical notes from you—all his medical notes—for almost any sum you like to mention."

"There is no sum in the world, no amount of gold on earth, that would compensate me for the loss of my husband's medical notes."

"They are no use to you whatever,"

"That is for me to decide."

Cecilia resumed her rapid walking.

"Do you mean to tell me," continued Phillips, "that you are going to keep your husband's valuable papers locked up in a dark closet? He has done much to aid suffering humanity. Are you going to be both cruel and wicked? I can make use of his notes. I am willing, abundantly willing, to compensate you with money for their loss."

"Suffice it, Dr. Phillips. There is no use whatever in prolonging this conversation. My husband would not wish you to have any notes of his. That fact ends the matter; you must see this for yourself."

Phillips's brow grew dark. He had the unpleasant sensation of a man who, over a game of chess, sees checkmate almost inevitable. Hope was not, however, dead within him. He looked around him, and tried to discover a move of sufficient dexterity to enable him to recover his lost position.

"I understand your scruples," he said, in his gentlest voice. "It is possible that I may yet be able to show you myself, and the integrity of my motives, in such a light that the prejudice you now feel against me will vanish, and you will allow me to complete the valuable work which your husband began."

"Never!" said Cecilia, with passion. "Don't nourish that hope in your breast, Dr. Phillips, for I can assure you it will never be gratified."

"Enough," said Phillips, half raising his hand. "You speak cruel words, for I have in every particular tried to be your friend. You cannot, endeavor as you may, deprive me of hope. A day will come——"

"The day you expect will never come," said Cecilia. "I cannot be too emphatic on that point. My husband did not wish you to have anything to do with his secret. I may as well tell you that I did speak of your strong desire to him on that dreadful evening when his fatal accident occurred. It would not be right to repeat his words, but the substance of them was this: you and he were not sympathetic spirits, and only sympathetic spirits could work such a discovery as his with any chance of success."

"Ah!" said Phillips, in a triumphant voice, "you have at last admitted that there is a discovery. That admission is quite enough for to-day. Thank you very much; that, and the fact that you have not been mad enough to burn your

husband's papers, gives me a feeling of assurance. I will not trouble you any further in the matter at present."

Cecilia bit her lips ; she was much vexed with herself for having made the admission she had done, but there was no help for it now. With a strong effort she turned the conversation into a different channel. Phillips was quick to see her design, and he aided her with all the grace that was part of his complex character.

Helen heard Cecilia's laugh as they walked over the brow of the hill. Nance skipped along with a glad look on her face.

"Mother doesn't often laugh now," she said. "Do you hear her? I am so very glad to hear her, aren't you?"

"Yes, darling," said Helen, stooping down and kissing the child.

CHAPTER VII.

CHANGES.

PHILLIPS's report with regard to Dorothy Sharpe was in every respect the truth. From the day she had seen Dr. Arbuthnot her spirits had flagged and her feeble strength had grown feebler. Her hitherto sweet temper became capricious, her appetite failed, and, as a natural consequence, her health began rapidly to decline.

It was impossible any longer for Lady Sharpe to conceal the fact from herself that Dorothy, her one treasure, was ill. All the symptoms that had so alarmed this poor mother long ago were once more developed, and with them came a train of new experiences for the unhappy and anxious woman. In the old times Dorothy's mind was gay, even if her body suffered. Dorothy's smile was brightest when the hectic fever burnt in her cheeks, and the strange, pathetic luster of ill health brightened her beautiful eyes. Now, Dorothy was fretful. In other words, she was difficult to manage. For some reason she shut her heart against her mother—she became reserved. She refused to speak either of her health or of her feelings. Any chance of an engagement between her and Frank Crichton seemed absolutely at an end. When he came to the house she refused to see him, and Lady Sharpe could not conceal from this anxious lover that her daughter was seriously unwell.

"Why don't you take her abroad?" asked Crichton,

"It is madness to keep her in this climate during the winter months. If Digby were alive you know perfectly well that he would have ordered her to the Engadine, or at least he would have ordered her out of England a couple of months ago."

"That is what makes Sir Probyn and myself so very unhappy," said Lady Sharpe. "Dorothy, who during all the past years of her life was the sweetest and most docile creature, has suddenly taken a whim into her head, and refuses point-blank to leave Cadogan Square. It is impossible to alter her determination without using grim force. Dorothy is no longer a child—she is two-and-twenty years of age. Were she a child, the matter could be easily managed, but being a young woman we must consult her inclinations."

"But this is madness. Could not I see her? Miss Sharpe is reasonable; I am persuaded that if I appealed to her reason, she would see the folly of putting an end to her own life."

"Oh, Mr. Crichton," exclaimed the poor mother, clasping her hands in despair, "if you *would* only use your influence in persuading Dorothy of the necessity of this step, her father and I would be forever grateful to you; but what is to be done? she refuses to see you! I know the poor child is very much attached to you, but she doesn't think it right to marry you in her present state of health, and therefore she will not see you when you come to the house."

"I will not worry her on the subject of our marriage until she is better. Can you assure her of this?"

"I will try," said Lady Sharpe. "I will go to her now. Stay where you are, and I will try and persuade her to come down and talk to you."

Lady Sharpe left the room, and Crichton went and stood by one of the windows. He was a very ardent and devoted lover, he would have taken Dorothy to his heart with all her weakness and illness, thinking nothing of the future, and only desiring to add to the happiness of the frail life he so loved, but Dorothy herself was resolved. He honored her for her determination, and respected her scruples, but a cloud hung over him day and night. His heart suddenly beat quickly, he heard a step on the stairs, the drawing-room door was slowly opened and the young girl came in.

There was a great change in her face. Six weeks had altered her as completely as six years might have done. She

was perceptibly thinner, her eyes were now almost too large for her small face, there were dark shadows under them. The lovely rose tint of her cheeks had given place to pallor. She came swiftly across the room, and standing by Crichton's side, put out her small hand and let him grasp it in both his own.

"Mother said you wished to see me, Frank," said Dorothy.

"I do," he said. "You know how much I wish to see you every day, and all day long; but I am not going to worry you on that point now; I want you to go to the Engadine, I want you to go anywhere out of England. If you are tired of the Engadine, why not try Egypt?"

"I would rather stay at home. Can you not see that? My father and mother utterly fail to understand me, but I did think, Frank, that you—that you——" Dorothy's eyes slowly filled with tears.

"What is it, my darling?" said the young man. "Listen to me, Dolly. Why should we be apart when we might be together?"

"We cannot be together," she exclaimed; "I will not be your wife."

"No, I will not urge it while you are so ill, but may I come to see you? Can we not be engaged to each other?"

"We can't, it would be useless."

"Dorothy, are you very much worse than you were six weeks ago?"

"I feel worse; I don't think I am sorry. The desire to live has left me; I do not know that I am really more ill than I have often been before, but I never felt utterly indifferent to life until now."

"Get engaged to me, and life will once more look charming."

"You are unfair to me, Frank. You promised mother that you would not worry me on this point if I consented to see you."

"I will never speak to you again on the subject until you give me leave, if in your turn you will make me a promise."

"What is that?"

"Let me come to see you every day."

"No, no! It would be useless. You cannot understand. It is possible for a girl to try to be strong, and yet feel weak and—and *tempted*. You cannot understand—— Oh! I do wish I could see Cecilia Digby; no one else knows what I suffer."

Dorothy burst into feeble tears. Crichton felt more and more alarmed. He took her hand and led her to the sofa.

Lady Sharpe came in ; Crichton looked at her and shook his head.

When he was leaving the house, Lady Sharpe followed him downstairs.

"Miss Sharpe is decidedly worse. You ought to send for Dr. Arbuthnot at once."

"Arbuthnot? Is he the best man?" asked Lady Sharpe.

"Undoubtedly, now that Digby is removed. Of course, there is no man of any weight in the profession who holds Digby's modern ideas, but Arbuthnot is extremely clever and kind, and in the present state of Miss Sharpe's health you ought to see him."

"I will ask him to call to-morrow morning," said Lady Sharpe.

Dorothy had never mentioned to her mother the fact of her having visited Dr. Arbuthnot with Mrs. Digby.

She was sitting in the drawing room the next morning when the physician entered. She happened to be alone ; her mother had not yet come downstairs. He came up and spoke to her as an old friend :

"Miss Sharpe, I thought you were out of England six weeks ago."

"Dr. Arbuthnot," she exclaimed impulsively, "Mother will be down in a moment ; I beg, I entreat of you not to tell her that I went to see you with Mrs. Digby."

The physician raised his eyebrows in astonishment. After a very brief pause, he took one of Dorothy's hands and gave it a comforting pressure.

"I will keep your secret," he said. "Be calm, don't excite yourself."

Lady Sharpe came into the room, and the necessary examination of Dorothy's lungs took place. Dr. Arbuthnot, according to the fashion of physicians of his class, gave a guarded opinion in the presence of the patient. On one point alone he was emphatic :

"You must leave England," he said ; "you must go abroad, you must get all the influence that sunshine can bring to bear upon your lungs, without delay."

"I will not leave England," she repeated.

"That is her cry, morning, noon, and night," said Lady

Sharpe. "It is incomprehensible. Dorothy has been one of the best girls up to the present——"

Dorothy began to sob feebly.

"I know I am dying," she exclaimed. "Why should everyone worry me? I hate the Riviera; I hate foreign life. If I have only a few months to live, may I not stay in my own home? If you will cease to worry me on that matter, mother, I will promise to be very good. Dr. Arbuthnot, do take my part. Don't you think that mind reacts on body? If I am very unhappy away from home, and if I am very much happier at home, don't you think that fact about balances matters? I am positively convinced that an unhappy mind makes the body more tired and weak and weary than anything else."

"There is some truth in that, young lady; but why should your mind be so unhappy? You are full of morbid ideas, evidently; we must get at the root of them."

"I am unhappy," she answered; "but my greatest dread at present is to go out of England, and to find myself very ill, perhaps dying, in a foreign land."

"Well, well, it would be impossible to press any point that you felt so strongly against," said the physician. "Lady Sharpe, I must have a little talk with you as to the best means of helping your daughter to get quite well again. Shall we go downstairs for a moment or two?"

"Is she very, very ill?" exclaimed Lady Sharpe the moment they were alone.

"It is impossible for me to conceal the truth from you, my dear madam. Miss Sharpe has got tubercular disease of both lungs. The progress of the disease is not rapid; I see no increase——" He stopped; he remembered that he had promised Dorothy not to reveal the fact that she had already seen him. "What makes me so uneasy with regard to your daughter," he continued, "is her evident unrest and perturbation of mind. She has something preying on her spirits. Until you can get at that, nothing can be done to alleviate her bodily symptoms."

"She has taken a most unreasonable dislike to leaving this house," said Lady Sharpe.

"I can see that. You must set her mind at rest on that point immediately. Until she is in a different frame of mind she must not leave England. Let her drive out in a close carriage. Your rooms are large; the weather happens to be

particularly mild ; give her all the change of air you possibly can from room to room in this house. Assure her that she shall never leave it until she herself wishes to do so. By degrees, as she becomes quite calm and happy, suggest to her the possibility of her going to Torquay ; but this for the future. Above all things, don't worry her. As soon as I leave, go up and tell her that, after talking the matter over with you, I have decided that it would be *very bad* for her to leave home. Is there no friend whom she loves, who would come and stay with her, to help to cheer her ? ”

“The only person she seems to care about is the wife of poor Dr. Digby.”

“Ah, a nice woman ! I happen to know her. Get her to come, by all means.”

“I will see what I can do.”

“There is another thing, Lady Sharpe. You will forgive me for being so very plain, but your daughter's mind is so evidently troubled that I must think of all those matters which so often form a prominent part in the affairs of the young. I allude to love. Have you any reason to suppose that Miss Sharpe is unhappy about an affair of the heart ? ”

A very slow smile crept into Lady Sharpe's face.

“It is right to confide in one's physician,” she answered. “Dorothy has scruples about engaging herself to a man who is devotedly attached to her, and who is in every respect worthy of her affection.”

“She grieves for him, then ? ”

“Unquestionably she does.”

“Oh, that is bad ! I have no doubt that is at the root of the mischief ; that accounts for her dislike to leaving England. Lady Sharpe, why not permit the engagement ? ”

“I am powerless in the matter, Dr. Arbuthnot. Dorothy herself is the arbiter of her own fate. Nothing will induce her to become engaged to Mr. Crichton. Ah ! what have I done ? I ought not to mention names.”

“You are safe with me, my dear madam ; I know Crichton. He is an excellent fellow. Would you permit me to speak to him on the subject of his attachment to Miss Sharpe ? ”

Lady Sharpe hesitated.

“I doubt if it would do any good,” she said ; “Dorothy is really the one to decide, and she has made up her mind that it would be wrong to marry. You agree with her on that point, don't you, Dr. Arbuthnot ? ”

Dr. Arbuthnot paused before he replied. His keen, bright eyes took in at a glance the expectant, wistful, agonized expression on the mother's face.

"It will break her heart, but she will bear up," he murmured, under his breath.

"Will you permit me to be quite plain with you?" he said aloud.

"Yes, yes," she replied. "God knows any truth would be better than this uncertainty."

"I will be quite plain with you," continued the physician. "Your daughter will never marry, Lady Sharpe. In her case, it is not a question of marriage, or of long life. Won't you sit down? This chair is comfortable. The thing for us to consider in her case is how best to prolong a dying life."

"God help me!" said Lady Sharpe. "My only child. I thought this blow would have been averted. God help her father and me!"

The physician paused again.

"My duty is most painful," he said. "Only in the interests of my patient would I pierce your heart. I must be frank with you. Miss Sharpe will never be well again, but at the same time she may live for one or two years. That will altogether depend on whether her mind is at rest or not."

"She thinks herself that she is dying. Oh, my darling! my sweet darling!"

"It is quite likely that in a day or two, indeed at any moment, your daughter's mind may develop a new phase—she may be quite as sure that she will live as she now is that she will die. This bright, hopeful phase will be good for her, and will be the best possible means of keeping the disease at bay. I will speak to Crichton, if you will permit me; there is, of course, no question of marriage, but an engagement between the two might do Miss Sharpe an infinitude of good."

Dr. Arbuthnot went away, and Lady Sharpe went slowly back to the drawing room.

Mothers can do a great deal—they can even tread on red-hot coals without shrinking. Each step may press a sword, but the face of the woman whose child's life hangs in the balance betrays no sign.

Lady Sharpe looked even cheerful when she went into the drawing room. She came up to Dorothy and kissed her. "Well, my love," she said, sitting down and taking her daughter's hand, "I am glad to be able to tell you that Dr.

Arbuthnot quite agrees with your own verdict about yourself."

Dorothy was lying back in a deep chair; she raised her eyes languidly, and fixed them on her mother.

"My verdict on myself," she said. "I forget—oh, yes! I said I was dying. He agrees with me? Then, mother, if I am dying, no one need worry me again about an impossible cure."

"My darling, you must listen to me quite calmly. Dr. Arbuthnot agreed with quite a different part of your verdict about yourself. He said that you had such a strong dislike to leaving England that it would be wrong to worry you any further on the matter. You are to stay here, Dorothy; here in your own home. The season happens to be unusually mild; we will go out together, my dear, and we will have friends to come to see us. We will make ourselves quite happy, and you shall not be teased any more, my darling, about plans that only worry you."

"Come and sit on the sofa, mother," said Dorothy. They walked across the great drawing room. The mother sat down first, and then the girl pressed up close to her, and laid her head on her shoulder.

"I feel quite rested," she said. "I don't want to go abroad; I was too tired even to think of it."

"Well," said Lady Sharpe, "we will forget the subject. What can I do now to amuse you? Are there any friends you would like to see?"

"No one to-day, I think. Let me hold your hand and dream."

Dorothy closed her eyes; her mother sat without moving a muscle. The little hand in hers felt hot, the rapid pulse in the wrist beat against the mother's arm. Lady Sharpe, as long as she lived, never forgot the agony of that enforced stillness; her heart felt as if it was pressing against an iron band. Dorothy had really sunk into a brief doze. She opened her eyes in a few minutes, raised her head, looked at her mother and kissed her.

"I am glad we are not going abroad," she said, "but we won't see a lot of people. I want us just to have a cozy time by ourselves."

"But the doctor said you ought to be cheered, my dearest."

"The only person I want to see is Cecilia Digby, but when we last wrote to her she was ill. I should like her to come and see me, but no one else."

"She is probably quite well again. I will write to her at once. Mrs. Digby and Nance might come and pay a visit here. What do you say, Dorothy?"

"I should like it, mother dear."

At the very moment that Lady Sharpe was writing her letter, Phillips and his wife were taking leave of Cecilia and Nance at High Barnet Station.

The doctor and his wife went back to town, and Cecilia and her little daughter returned to their ivy-covered cottage. Miss Timmins met them on the steps.

"My dear," she said to Cecilia, "Dr. Hobart has called to see you. He expressed surprise when he heard that you were out so late."

"There is nothing whatever to fear in my being out late," said Cecilia, in a bright tone.

"Dr. Hobart does not agree with you. He expressed distinct disapproval at your imprudence. I must say, however, that you look well. You have completely lost your cough, and you are not so thin as you were before your illness."

"I feel in perfect health," answered Mrs. Digby.

She paused on the doorstep; the door of the cottage was open behind her; she stood facing the garden. Her eyes had a dreamy, far away expression. Nance, who watched every look on her mother's face, glanced at her with affectionate inquiry.

"The sun is just setting, mother," she said. "Do you see over there, where all that bright glow is?" She pointed to the mist with her little slender hand. "I like to look at the sun setting, for I know the golden gates are somewhere near," she continued.

Cecilia bent down and kissed the child.

"My little Nance!" she said with fervor. "My precious little Nance!"

"Mother," said the child, "we haven't had a talk about father for a long, long time. I have thought of heaps to tell you; lots of fresh things have come to me. He has done a whole quantity of wonderful, beautiful things since the last time we spoke about him, and he often comes to the gates and looks down into the world, and he sees—mother, mother, what is the matter?"

"Nothing, Nance. What do you mean?"

"I can't bear it, mother; it makes me cry to see you with that look on your face. I am so glad when you laugh, and

when you smile I feel ever so happy, but that look hurts me; it is like a sword going into me. Mother, mother, don't!"

"My dearest, your imagination is running away with you. You must not excite yourself in that fashion."

Cecilia dropped down on her knees and clasped Nance to her heart.

"There, dearest," she said, "there is nothing wrong."

"Only my heart aches, mother."

"Why should it ache, my sweet?"

"I think—I think—may I really tell you?"

"Yes, of course you may, my darling."

"I want so badly to talk about father."

"Yes, Nance."

"You are trembling again, mother."

"I—it's all right, Nance."

"It isn't, mother. I can see through you, and that makes me unhappy. There is something the matter with you, and the thought of it pierces into my heart. You won't let me talk about father to you lately. I have tried often, often, and you won't let me go on. You always stop me, and you always grow pale, and your hand always trembles. What is the matter, mother? What is wrong?"

"Nothing whatever, Nancy. I have been weak and ill of late, and the subject moves me very much. I did not know, my little girl, that I was giving you great pain. Come, it is an exquisite evening; father seems nearer when we are outside, does he not? We are more in God's world when bricks and mortar do not surround us; we will walk round the garden and we will——"

"Talk," said Nance joyfully. "I will tell you some of my thoughts. The nearer you get to God, the more beautiful everything is. That is why father is so happy now—he is close to God, he is in the same house with God. When he goes out he walks in God's garden—that is why he is so *very* happy. Mother, may I really tell you of what is in my heart?"

"Yes, Nance, I will listen to you; hold my hand, sweet."

"Last night," continued the child, "I had a dream. While I slept I saw father. In my dream I did not think that he was dead: he looked just as he always looked, only his face had a different expression—I can't quite explain the look, but I'd like to try."

The child paused for a minute.

"The first thing about his face," she continued, speaking with a solemnity almost unnatural in one so young, "was a look that people don't wear in this world. I never saw any one with that look except father himself once or twice. He had it for about half a minute when he was telling me about the golden gates, and the end of the road, and the bright time at the other side. The look never stayed, it came and it went—it came and it went as quick as lightning, but in my dream, mother, it stayed—and——"

"Aunt Abigail is calling me, Nance; I must go," said Cecilia. "Kiss me, sweet, first. Your thoughts are lovely, lovely. I will listen to more presently. Run just once around the garden, and then come in."

Cecilia kissed the child with great fervor, and ran into the house. Nance stood still in the middle of the garden path.

"That is always the way, lately," she said to herself. "There is something the matter with my mother; she is unhappy when I speak about father."

CHAPTER VIII.

BEAUTIFUL LIFE.

CECILIA ran quickly until a projection of the house hid her little daughter from her view. Then she stood still, clasping and unclasping her hands with the action of one in great mental pain.

"I cannot draw back now," she said to herself. "I crossed the Rubicon when I——" She paused again, her troubled eyes sought the ground. "Forward now!" she said to herself; "I must have courage and go on."

She entered the house, and went into the little oak-lined parlor, where Miss Timmins was busily preparing tea.

"Now that's right, Cecil," said the old lady; "you have just come in time to help me. The fire is nice and clear, and we want some toast made. I hope to goodness you didn't leave that child in the garden?"

"She is all right," said Cecilia. "The air is perfectly dry and mild. She won't come to any harm; you may be sure of that."

"Fiddlestick!" exclaimed the old lady. "A delicate child, too!"

She dropped her own toasting fork and ran to the window.

"Look at her, Cecilia!" she exclaimed. "Sweet little creature! She is walking along slowly, looking up at the stars, and singing softly to herself. She's the best and dearest child I ever came across, and as like that good doctor as child can be. Now, what's the matter? Oh, I declare she's gone! I never met anyone like Cecilia Digby now, all jumps and starts, and nervousness, and running away if you even look at her. Kissing and petting Nance one moment fit to break your heart, and the next avoiding her. Laughing quite gayly one minute, and down in the very depths the next. And yet, with it all, purposeful, too, and with a light in her eyes as if she was hugging a glad secret to herself. She's in good health, too; no doubt whatever about that. A few weeks ago I was anxious about her; she had got over the inflammation of the lungs—a fiddlestick for its new name, I can't bring my tongue round it—but she hacked and she barked and she worried my life out. There's a great difference in coughs—there's the throat cough, and the chest cough, and the stomach cough. Mine is the throat cough; it's forty years now since it began, and it will follow me to the grave. I'd be lonely without it, I really should; if I didn't hack at night I wouldn't know myself. But Cecilia's was a chest cough, and that strikes on the heart with a blow every time you listen to it. But it's gone; I haven't heard it for a fortnight or three weeks. Praise the Lord for His mercies, I say—there's well known to be consumption in the—— Is that you, Nance? Come in, my dearie, come in to your supper."

"Where's my mother?" asked the child. She stood in the doorway, a little, pale figure in her black dress. There was a faint color on her cheeks, her gray eyes looked wistful.

"I suppose your mother's upstairs, pet," said Miss Timmins. "You shout to her from the foot of the stairs."

"No, I won't," said Nance. "Mother doesn't like to be disturbed when she is busy. Shall I tell you about a dream I had last night, Aunt Abigail?"

"Now, my darling, you know that I don't believe in dreams."

"Father did. I often told him my dreams. He used to say, 'That was a beautiful thought that came to you in the night, Nance.' What's the matter, Aunt Abigail?"

"There, child, I have spoilt that egg; I meant to prepare it for your mother's supper."

"Mother doesn't care what she eats, lately."

"I know; I wish we could give her a good shaking between us, you and I. She wants—— Oh, there you are, Cecilia! Nance and I were just talking about you. Why, heaven preserve us, dear! you are not going out again? Well, of all the mad people!"

"I am going to see Dr. Hobart, Aunt Abigail. I shall not be very long away. Eat a good supper, Nancy, dearest. I shall be sure to be back in time to go on with 'The Tanglewood Tales.'"

The next moment Cecilia had left the room and was walking along the country road that led to Dr. Hobart's house. It was a humble little cottage, for the local doctor was blessed with a very moderate income. Cecilia was fortunate enough to find him at home, and was shown at once into his consulting room.

"I heard you had called to see me," she began, "so to save you the trouble of repeating your visit, I came to you."

"It would not have been the least trouble to come again, I can assure you, Mrs. Digby."

"You are very good to say so. Miss Timmins tells me that you were displeased when you found that I was out of doors so late in the afternoon."

"Well, can you wonder? In the state of your lungs——"

"That is just the point, my lungs feel quite well."

Dr. Hobart permitted himself to breathe a very gentle sigh. Then he glanced at the woman opposite to him. She wore her widow's dress and bonnet; her long veil was swept back from her pale face.

Dr. Hobart was sensible, worthy, commonplace, but he was also susceptible. Cecilia was a beautiful woman. He had never seen anyone like her; she had the sort of charm which tantalizes while it allures. Dr. Hobart felt his position a cruel one. It was painful to have to tell this lovely woman, in the prime of her youth, that there was little or no hope of her escaping that scourge which carries so many victims to an early and unwished-for grave.

After a brief delay, he put on his professional tone and began to say smooth things.

Cecilia interrupted him with impatience:

"I know what you would tell me," she said; "you do not consider my lungs sound."

"Well, Mrs. Digby, if you must know the truth——"

"You may be quite sure that I wish to hear nothing

but the exact truth. Six weeks ago you examined my lungs."

"Six weeks ago," repeated Dr. Hobart, "I examined your lungs, and found that tubercular disease had undoubtedly begun in both of them. On further examination bacilli were undoubtedly present. I told you the exact truth at the time."

"You did. Your verdict corresponded with my own symptoms. You know that my husband was a great authority on such matters. During his lifetime I studied the matter not a little. I felt that your verdict was correct, for it tallied with my own symptoms. I had the weariness and constant thirst which accompany this malady. I also had the night perspirations and the hacking cough."

Cecilia paused here. A great flood of color swept over her face, her eyes were bright with excitement. Her voice shook with agitation. She rose slowly from her seat.

"Dr. Hobart," she said, "I have come to you to-night to tell you that the symptoms of which I complained have vanished. I sleep well, I eat well, I have no weariness, I have no cough, I have no night perspirations. I walked a couple of miles to-day, and had not the slightest trace of lassitude when my walk was over. In short, if symptoms go for anything, I am at the present moment enjoying perfect health. It is my firm belief that the state of my lungs must correspond to the state of my sensations. Will you have the goodness to examine them most carefully?"

Dr. Hobart did so. Presently he uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"This is wonderful," he said. "I can scarcely credit my own ears. One moment longer, I beg. I must listen once again. Ah, no! there is no mistake. The sounds are perfectly clear. Mrs. Digby, you are a wonderful woman."

"Then I am better?"

"Better? You are apparently cured! The small patches of tubercle have dried up. They were all too present a month ago. Now I can scarcely detect their existence. This is a most remarkable case. Can it be due to the air of High Barnet? My dear Mrs. Digby, I congratulate you from my very heart. You have made the most marvelous recovery from tubercular disease on record—yes, positively on record. You will permit me, my dear madam, you will permit me——"

"To do what?" asked Cecilia, as she drew on her gloves.

Her cheeks were crimson, her eyes had a proud light in them.

"To write a letter to the *Lancet*? This thing must be known," exclaimed the excited doctor. "I am a native of this locality, and if we can prove the salubrious nature of the air as having any effect on your astonishing cure, the place is made—absolutely made."

"Still," said Cecilia, "I must ask you not to write to the *Lancet*."

"Why, why? Surely you are not ashamed of the fact that the air of High Barnet has cured you?"

"I do not wish to have my case discussed. I have been ill and am well again. There is just a possibility, Dr. Hobart, that you may have been mistaken when you declared my lungs to be seriously affected."

"No, no. Living organisms existed. You remember how carefully I made my examination?"

"You did; I will retract my words. Still, I must repeat my earnest request that you will not mention my cure to anyone."

Dr. Hobart fidgeted and looked dissatisfied.

"I am a poor man," he began. "Such a case as yours would bring me that pleasant notoriety which all men who want to be rich covet. I have a wife and five children. Hitherto we have had a hard struggle. The letter I should write would do you no harm; I should, of course, be careful to mention no names."

"Will you accept a fee from me of twenty pounds?"

The doctor stammered and colored.

"Oh, but really," he began, "you are too generous; and then, if report is correct——"

"Never mind reports, Dr. Hobart. I came here prepared to offer you a fee to this extent. You have been very kind to me. I trust to your honor not to discuss my case in any medical paper. Good-night!"

Mrs. Digby left the house and went home. Miss Timmins thought her particularly cheerful that evening. She was less *distracted* than usual. She entered into small matters of intense moment both to Nance and Henny-Penny. The old Cecilia seemed to have come back. On one subject alone did she maintain intense reserve. Nance could not get her to speak of Digby.

By and by, the small household slept, and only the mother and mistress lay awake.

Cecilia tossed from side to side on her restless bed. Her little daughter lay like a sleeping angel by her side. There was a night light burning in the room, and Cecilia noticed that Nance smiled several times in her dreams. Once she bent forward and kissed the sweet forehead ; a shadow seemed then to pass over the child's face. She murmured her father's name, anxiety in her tone ; then, turning from her mother, smiled in her happy dreams once more.

"Poor little Nance !" murmured Cecilia. "She can't understand me just now, nor can I quite understand myself. All I know is this : I must go on ; and I dare not talk of my dead husband."

In the morning she got up with a tired look on her face, but resolve in her eyes.

"Aunt Abigail," she said, "I am going to town to-day."

"May I come with you, mother ?" asked Nance.

"Not to-day, my dearest. You must learn your pretty poems, and practice your music, and be very kind to Aunt Abigail, and very affectionate to Henny-Penny, and most likely by the last train I shall come back. What is the matter, Aunt Abigail ? I can see from your face that many thoughts are crowding to your lips."

"They won't find utterance," replied Miss Timmins. "I am quite accustomed to thinking thoughts which never get into speech. You look well, Cecilia. I may say that I never saw you look better."

"I feel well," replied Mrs. Digby. "The possession of health is an inestimable blessing. It supports one under mental trials. Only those who have gone through weariness and pain know how mind reacts on body. My body is well now ; as a natural consequence my mind is, comparatively speaking, cheerful."

Nance had run out of the room. Miss Timmins rose from her seat at the table, went up to Cecilia, and looked into her face.

"I am glad you are better," she said. "I am also glad you are happier. You will forgive me, my dear, if I say one thing. The present Cecilia Digby is to me a sealed book. I fail to understand you."

Cecilia laughed slightly.

"Aunt Abigail," she said, "you must not imagine mysteries about me. I have gone through a good deal, and I have learnt reserve ; that is the long and short of it all. I have

undoubtedly lost much, but it would not be right to go mourning all my days. While life remains there is work to be done. Now I have just time to catch the next train to town. Oh ! here is the post."

"A letter for you, mother," said Nance, running in eagerly.

"From Lady Sharpe," said Cecilia. She opened the envelope, read its contents with changing color, then, replacing the sheet of paper in its cover, she turned to Miss Timmins.

"It is possible that I may not come home to-night," she said. "Lady Sharpe tells me that Dorothy is seriously unwell. She wants me to go and see her, and it is quite evident, from the tone of her letter, that she may wish me to stay in Cadogan Square for two or three days.

"Oh, mother !" began Nance.

"In that case," continued Cecilia, glancing at the child, "I may send for you, Nance, for Lady Sharpe has kindly invited you also, but I will not take you to London with me, darling. I will let you know what my plans are by a letter."

"Is Miss Sharpe really much worse ?" asked Miss Timmins.

"I fear she is very much worse ; I must go to see her without delay."

Cecilia went to town, and early in the afternoon arrived at the house in Cadogan Square. She was shown at once into the drawing room, where Lady Sharpe came forward to meet her.

The moment the poor lady saw Cecilia she burst into uncontrollable weeping.

"Oh, hush !" said Mrs. Digby. "Suppose Dorothy comes in and finds you in this state of trouble."

"My dear, my dear, I can't help myself ; and Dorothy won't come in, for she is not up yet. I have kept it all in ever since yesterday, ever since that dreadful, dreadful moment when Dr. Arbuthnot told me that my only child was dying."

Lady Sharpe sobbed distressfully as she spoke. Cecilia bent toward her, then, moved by an uncontrollable impulse, put her arms round the troubled woman, and drew her head to rest on her shoulder.

"Be comforted," she said ; "be comforted. While there is life there is hope."

"Oh, don't speak to me of hope ! You know—your hus-

band must have told you—how relentless this disease is; how all the doctors in Christendom, how all that science and love and skill can do, are powerless. You know it, Cecilia Digby. Why do you speak to a broken-hearted mother of hope?"

"Is there no balm in Gilead?" said Cecilia suddenly. "Lady Sharpe, if my husband were alive at this moment——!"

"If he were, Cecilia, what then? He could not cure Dorothy."

"He could do much for her. I dare say no more."

After a few moments Lady Sharpe wiped away her tears. She began to consult with Cecilia on various minor points. Dolly must be amused, must be comforted. That great depression of mind must be overcome; it was all essential that happiness should come back as a guest and lodge in her breast.

"Dr. Arbuthnot is positive on that point," said Lady Sharpe. "He even goes the length of wishing her to become engaged to Frank Crichton."

"All in good time," said Cecilia. "Dorothy is too weak at present to bear the excitement of an engagement. Do you think I may go up now and see her?"

"Yes, my love. I will show you the way."

The two ladies went upstairs, and Cecilia entered Dorothy's beautiful bedroom.

The girl was lying on the sofa in a pale blue tea gown. She stretched out her arms to Cecilia, and kissed her several times.

"You look quite bright," she said, in her feeble voice, "and they told me you were ill."

"I was ill, Dolly, but I have quite recovered now."

"And yet you had pneumonia; your lungs were affected."

"For a time they were, but I am in perfect health at the present moment. Now let us talk of something else."

"Are you going to stay with me?"

"Do you really wish me to stay?"

"Of course I do. I have come to that pass when I want nothing very earnestly, but if there is one thing more than another which would give me comfort at the present moment, it is your presence. You will stay with me, won't you?"

"And we will send for Nance and Henny-Penny, too," said Lady Sharpe; "they shall have Dorothy's old nursery all to themselves."

"And I will make Nance a present of my big babyhouse,"

said Dorothy, raising herself slightly on her sofa, and smiling.

"Dear Cecilia, you have done her good already!" exclaimed the mother. "That settles it, then. You will allow us to send for Nance?"

"You are very kind; I believe I can be of some use to Dolly. At least, I can promise one thing: I won't allow her to be dismal, and, on the other hand, I won't permit her to get overexcited."

"You are a very wise nurse," said Lady Sharpe. She left the room, to return in a few moments.

"I am sending Palmer down to High Barnet to fetch Nance," she said. "Next to you, Dolly loves Nance more than anyone in the world, and it would be a great pleasure to Sir Probyn and myself to have her in the house."

"I will write a note, then, giving some directions," said Cecilia.

She took out her pencil, scribbled a few lines on a sheet of paper, put it into an envelope, and directed it to Miss Timmins.

"Thank you very much," she said; "I know Nance will be quite delighted to come and stay with Dolly."

Lady Sharpe took the note out of the room, and the sick girl and her friend were alone.

"At last," said Dorothy. "At long last, Cecilia. Oh, I have waited for this!"

"For what, my darling?"

"For you, and for what I hoped you would be able to tell me."

"Dorothy, it is wrong of you to excite yourself."

"It is worse to be kept in suspense. You remember that day after we had paid our secret visit to Dr. Arbuthnot? You know you promised to write to me soon? I waited day after day for a letter, but none came. At last Miss Timmins sent me a tiny note. You were very ill with pneumonia. You could not write."

"I could not, Dorothy. I longed to write to you many, many times, but I could not do it. Twice I sat down before a sheet of paper, pen in hand, but I could put no words upon the empty sheet."

"Why was that, Cecilia? Cecilia, you have got that queer look again on your face."

"Have I?"

Dorothy watched her friend narrowly.

"And you don't look at all ill," continued the girl. "If you had pneumonia, your lungs must have been affected. I have heard that you, too, both you and Nance, are not very strong, that you have a tendency to the same disease which is killing me. If you suffered from pneumonia you ought not to look so well as you do to-day."

"Never mind about it just now, Dolly darling. The subject is too exciting, and you are too weak to speak of it at present. Try to be calm. Let us talk about common things."

"I can't! I won't! You don't know how I feel—I have no desire to live, but I hate to die. I imagine all sorts of horrors; I hate the cold grave; I picture myself—oh, Cecil! may I tell you some of my horrors?"

"If it will do you any good, Dorothy, I will gladly listen. I see that you have been repressing a great part of yourself for some time. You may tell me anything you like. There was a time when I, too, was haunted by bogies, but they turned out to be mere bogies, things without form or substance. My husband taught me how to run my sword through them until they vanished."

"Yes!" said Dorothy, "but he is dead. He used to give me courage, too. Can I forget his look? Can I forget the comforting feel of his strong hand? When he spoke to me a great breeze of courage came into my feeble heart. He has gone, and his words, too, seem to have departed. I lie here hour after hour and think of death. I wonder how it will happen; I wonder often about the pain of the last moment. The awful sense of suffocation—the dim sight. The friends appearing to go further and further away, while I drift—I drift down—down! Then I think about my body after the soul has gone out of it. How cold and still it will lie, and how mother will come and kiss it and cry over it, and I—I shan't be able to say a word; and my father—I picture the broken-hearted look on his face, how his head will be bowed, how his hair will turn rapidly white. And I think of my funeral and my coffin. Such a narrow box after the air and comfort and freedom of life. Then, such a cold, dark room as the family vault where they will place me! and other dead people all around me! and the footsteps of the living as they go away! and the silence!—the silence!"

"But, Dorothy," interrupted Cecilia, "this is wrong, this is the height of morbidity."

"Why is it the height of morbidness?" asked the poor girl. "You know that I am going to die—beautiful life is going away from me and grim death is coming to claim me. Oh! I am not a bit resigned. I feel changed in every way. I would give all the world, all the wide world, for a year or two more of life. I don't love life, with its weariness and pain and suffering, but, at least, it is better than death."

"But, Dorothy, my darling, you must try and remember that with death comes oblivion. When your soul leaves your body, your body will feel nothing more. It will not know about parting and pain and cold solitude."

"No, no; but I realize it all. I suffer with my poor, deserted body. Then, too, there is my soul. Cecilia, how can you tell that my soul will go to heaven?"

"Dearest Dorothy——"

"How can you tell?" persisted Dorothy. "I feel frightfully rebellious against God. Perhaps God is angry with me. Perhaps there is a hell of torture. O Cecilia, you can't tell what I feel! You can't possibly realize what I suffer."

While Dorothy spoke the fever rose in her veins. The sparkle of false health came into her eyes; the hectic of false beauty visited her cheeks. She left her sofa, and, strong with the strength of fever, began restlessly to pace up and down her room.

Mrs. Digby, who had sat very calm while the young girl was speaking, rose now, and, with a quick impulse, came up to her side.

"Dorothy," she said, "you must control yourself. I can tell you nothing definite at this moment—I have to speak to others first, but I do not mind letting you know one thing. I have not come up here without a definite object. You must hope, Dorothy, and trust. I can say nothing more at present."

"Nothing more! But to hope means everything," said Dorothy, her manner changing, the reckless look leaving her eyes, her cheeks paling with an emotion that was sweet, restful, and glad.

"I can trust you," she exclaimed impulsively. "I can and I will. I will prove my trust by asking you nothing more until you choose to tell it to me."

CHAPTER IX.

WAS SHE AN ANGEL FROM HEAVEN?

THE long and dreary day had come to an end. Dorothy was in bed and asleep. Little Nance, in ecstasy at finding herself once more with her dearly loved "Dolly," was also in the land of dreams. Sir Probyn was out attending a political meeting, and Lady Sharpe and Mrs. Digby were alone.

Dr. Arbuthnot had put Dorothy under the care of a very clever family physician in the neighborhood. He had come in to see her late that evening, pronounced her slightly better, had ordered a sleeping draught in case she was restless, and had gone away.

Lady Sharpe sat before the fire in her dressing room. Cecilia stood by the mantelpiece.

"I should like to tell you a story," said Cecilia at last, in a slow voice.

"Yes, my dear." Lady Sharpe raised her heavy eyes. Her interest in all stories except her own was languid just now. A queer smile crept round Cecilia's lips. She said to herself:

"How soon I can waken the dormant fire in those eyes!"

Aloud she remarked gently:

"Before I tell you anything about my story, I must get you to make me a promise."

"A promise about a story? Very well, my dear, I'll promise anything. Won't you take a chair?"

"I like standing best. The story I am going to tell will interest you extremely, but before I tell it to you, I must get you most solemnly to promise that you will never repeat it to anyone."

"What do you mean, Cecilia? Your face has a queer expression."

"More than one person has remarked about the queer expression on my face lately. Your face, too, would look queer if you knew what I know."

"You have discovered——" Lady Sharpe began. Her lips fell apart, her eyes blazed, she sat bolt upright on her chair.

"Promise that you will never tell."

"Oh, I promise, I promise. Go on, go on!"

"You will never whisper what I say to you to living mortal?"

"I never will."

"Not even to Sir Probyn?"

Lady Sharpe hesitated.

"He has known all my heart hitherto."

"He must never know of this."

"Very well, Cecilia; I promise. What you say to me to-night shall never pass my lips. Go on, you don't know what I am enduring. You have discovered——"

Cecilia walked across the room and locked the door. Then she returned to her former place by the mantel-piece.

"I have, first of all, a confession to make," she began, in a low, dreary voice. "No woman ever had a better husband than I had. He was clever and honorable and brave. He died. On his dying bed he extracted from me a promise which I made, Lady Sharpe, in all faith, and far, far more solemnly than you have now promised to keep the secret I am confiding to you. What I have to confess is this: I have broken the promise made to my dearly beloved husband on his deathbed. I have broken it—and I don't repent. I mean to break it again. I mean to tempt you to help me to break it again to-night. If you are afraid of me, you had better turn me out of the room. Now, I have told you frankly what sort of woman I am. I am doubtless wicked, and I am not even repentant. I cannot now speak of her father to his child. I try to do so, but I cannot; and there is a gulf between the sweet child and me. Otherwise, I am much as I was: in rather better health, perhaps; calmer of nerve, less passionate, than of old. You see what a cold-blooded monster I must be. Having lifted just a scrap of the curtain, and shown you my heart, had I not better go away?"

"No, no, Cecilia. Sit down, go on. Whatever you have to reveal, I must listen to it now; your words have excited me beyond reason."

"Very well. I will speak to you. I will tell you the promised story. Years ago my husband discovered a remedy which could cure consumption."

Lady Sharpe sprang suddenly to her feet.

"You astonish me, you terrify me," she said. "Surely you must be wandering in your mind! Dr. Digby made a

discovery for the cure of consumption, and kept it to himself! Quite impossible! Dear Mrs. Digby, your troubles have turned your brain."

"No; I never felt more sane in my life. I have stated a fact, and can give you good proof of its existence. Years before we were married my husband prepared a certain lymph, with the idea of inoculating tuberculous patients with it. He told me of this preparation, but always declared that his discovery was immature, incomplete. He said that hundreds of proofs of success must be obtained, through endless and endless experiments, before it would be safe to proclaim such a cure to the world. My husband was a most scrupulous man. He was often tempted to try the effect of this lymph on consumptive people, but, in reality, he went down to his grave having made one experiment only."

"And that?" asked Lady Sharpe with white lips.

"Was made on himself many years ago."

"Surely your husband was never consumptive?"

"That is the point. He was not. As far as the experiment could be said to be of any value as made on a healthy person, it was successful. He never would repeat it, never. I own that, in that particular, I fail to understand him. I own that his conduct has puzzled me beyond words."

"He must have had his reasons, Mrs. Digby—so good a man, so tender-hearted, so devoted to the cause of suffering humanity. I can recall his face now on the first day that I ever saw him, when he told me so sadly and yet so firmly that I had made a mistake—that, to his knowledge, there was no cure for the disease with which my child was threatened. As long as I live I shall never forget his face as it looked that day. The pity, the strength, the goodness that shone out of it. You must be laboring under a huge mistake, my dear friend. Your husband would *never* have kept such a cure to himself."

"He did keep it to himself, Lady Sharpe, and his reasons for doing so were perfectly consistent with his character. He considered the experiment he had made on himself of minor importance, because he had no trace of tubercular disease in his system. He told me more than once that it was impossible to foresee what the effect of the lymph would be on a person already affected with a tendency to consumption. He said he dared not try the lymph on such persons. He had almost a morbid feeling on the subject, and although he

hoped to live to complete what he believed to be an immature idea, he did not stir very actively in the matter during the latter years of his extremely busy life."

"Dr. Phillips knew something of this discovery of your husband's, Mrs. Digby. Dr. Digby must have spoken of it at some time in the profession."

"Never. It has been the greatest possible puzzle to us both how Dr. Phillips obtained the knowledge which he undoubtedly possessed. He has worried me and annoyed my husband not a little in the matter; but his conduct scarcely concerns us now. Shall I go on?"

"Yes, my dear. My heart and soul hang on your words."

"On his dying bed Laurence said to me, 'Burn certain papers which contain a full account of my imperfect discovery. Burn them, or, if you cannot bring your mind to do that, send them in a sealed packet to a physician who will know what to do with them.' Those were my husband's dying words, and I promised most faithfully to obey him. God heard me, and so did the devil. Shall I go on?"

"Yes, my poor dear; you are trembling very much."

"I want to get away from that deathbed scene, even in my thoughts. I shall soon be calm enough."

"Lady Sharpe, I broke my promise. I did *not* burn the papers. I sealed them up in a packet, and directed them to the doctor in whom my husband trusted. For three months they lay in a drawer, untouched, unlooked at; but the weight of them pressed day and night against my heart. Then Dorothy came to me, and told me that consumption was making her its prey once more. On the night after she left me I opened the sealed packet, and read my husband's clearly expressed notes from beginning to end. All that passed through his mind he recorded on paper. His dim first impressions; his reasons for supposing that a certain remedy might conquer a certain disease; the gradual way in which the light entered his brain; his experiment on himself and its consequences; an exact and most exhaustive account of the right way to prepare this remedy; and lastly, full particulars with regard to the applying of his cure in cases of consumption."

"My brain seemed to turn dizzy as I read, then it grew clear and my nerves steady, and I said to myself, 'There must have been some latent madness in my husband's brain or he would have used this cure, complete in all its details, on the human frame.' I made one last discovery before I went

to bed that night. Accompanying the papers was a small box. It contained about a dozen tiny glass tubes, hermetically sealed, each of which contained a few drops of the precious remedy, and lying beside them was a hypodermic syringe, necessary for the introduction of the fluid beneath the skin.

"I locked up the papers and box, and went to bed.

"I will tell you nothing of that night, nor of the illness which followed. When I recovered from a severe attack of pneumonia, the local doctor examined my lungs, and told me that what my husband had long dreaded for me had come to pass. I, too, was smitten with the scourge. The usual cheerful face accompanied the physician's words, the usual assurance that I need not be very anxious was given to me. I knew better, I knew that I was doomed.

"The doctor went away, and I had a struggle with myself."

"Yes," said Lady Sharpe, "you had a struggle with yourself? Yes?" She tottered to her feet, came up to Cecilia, and clasped her hands with a vise of iron. Her face looked gray in its absorbed interest.

"I had a struggle with myself for two days. What I went through then matters to no one. At the end of that time I either rose to a height of courage, or fell to a depth of ignominy—before God, I don't know whether I rose or fell!—I tried my husband's remedy on my own person."

"And Cecilia—go on, go on, what followed?"

"I was cured. That is all."

"Oh, my God!" said Lady Sharpe.

She fell on her knees in a kind of agony, which was half ecstasy, half torture. Then, groping forward almost blindly on her knees, she caught Cecilia's hands and pressed them reverently to her lips.

"You are an angel," she said. "You are an angel sent to me straight from heaven."

"No, don't call me that. Get up, Lady Sharpe. In a moment like this we must both keep calm, we must subdue our feelings and bring our intellects to bear on the decision which lies before us. The question now to answer is this: Shall I risk trying the remedy on Dorothy?"

"Yes, yes. How can you hesitate? How can anyone hesitate? There is not a moment to lose—there is not an instant to delay. Cecilia Digby, it is your duty, your noble,

great, grand duty, to bring Dorothy back to life, and to keep two tortured hearts from being broken."

"You must not speak in that way," said Cecilia again. "If it is possible to do so, we must think this thing out without emotion. I recall my husband's notes, I recall his many conversations with me on this subject. He has often said to me, 'I cannot use the cure which I have discovered on the human frame without endless experiments.'"

"But why?" interrupted Lady Sharpe. "Why did he speak in that manner? You told me that the remedy was perfect, that he absolutely filled glass tubes with the preparation. He tried it on himself without injury, you tried it on yourself, and you were cured, you are absolutely cured, although consumption had begun."

"That is a fact. There were living organisms in my lungs: they have disappeared. From the moment those organisms died, I got well. There is not the least doubt that the introduction of the lymph into my body destroyed them."

"You must try the remedy on Dorothy, Cecilia. My mind is made up."

"Sit down, Lady Sharpe. Let us talk this thing out thoroughly. It is right to tell you that my husband's apprehensions were these. The lymph in question is a very active poison. It is, in fact, a much diluted form of the complaint under which your daughter suffers. According to recent scientific lights, which I need not go into, it may produce symptoms which will kill all susceptibility to the disease in her frame, but—and here is the danger which my husband apprehended—it may also rapidly develop the complaint. Dorothy at the present moment is suffering from a form of consumption, but the disease is making slow progress; she is weak and nervous, her mind is in a very morbid and unhealthy state, her lungs are affected, but the disease itself proceeds slowly. If I introduce this lymph into her body, it may cure her, or she may die in a few weeks' time. You must face this fact, Lady Sharpe. That is the point to consider. The remedy may cure or it may hasten death."

"This is terrible," said the mother. "This new light which you throw on the thing makes me fear it as much as I long for it. Oh! what shall I do? Dare I run the risk? Ought I not to consult Dr. Arbuthnot?"

"No, I must ask you not to do that. Dr. Arbuthnot would on no account use the remedy. He would take away my

husband's papers, and lock them in a dark drawer, and forget them. The most advanced doctor in London would only use this lymph after months, perhaps years, of experiments. In the meantime, Dorothy dies."

"What would you do, Cecilia, if you were in my place?"

"I can scarcely put myself in your place."

"Would you use this remedy on Nance if you saw any likelihood of consumption beginning in her little frame?"

Cecilia hesitated for a moment and turned pale.

"I think I should use the remedy," she said, in a low voice.

"It has cured me, and Nance must inherit my peculiarities; but the case is scarcely analogous. 'Like mother, like child,' is a well known proverb; we have not a similar history to go upon in Dorothy's case."

"No, and yet I am strongly, strongly tempted. Mrs. Digby, you must advise me!"

"I dare not. I have told you all; it is for you to decide on this matter."

"You forbid me to consult Sir Probyn?"

"I do, because I am positively convinced that he would not entertain the idea."

"God knows what is right!" said Lady Sharpe. "The child is dying and miserable, we may save her and give her happiness. Oh, that light from heaven could be poured down upon us! Mrs. Digby, if the cure is successful, is there anything, in your opinion, to prevent Dorothy's marriage?"

"On that very point I wish to speak. In one of my husband's papers he said that, if the remedy were successful, it would destroy all tendency to consumption in the body of the person cured. In that case the power to transmit the disease to another must also be destroyed."

"Then she could marry, and marry safely. She would be brought back to health, and her future would be as happy as any other happy girl's. Oh, Mrs. Digby! I think I shall risk it."

"You ought to consult Dorothy. My feelings in a case of this kind are that the patient herself ought to consent. The risk she runs is simply this: at the worst she hastens her death by two or three months, at the best she returns to life and health."

Lady Sharpe rose suddenly from her chair.

"I must spend the night thinking it over," she said. "No, I will do more. I will spend the night on my knees. I will let you know my decision in the morning."

Cecilia went away to her own room. She, too, fell on her knees, but she quickly rose again.

"There is a gulf between my husband and me," she said. "He is in heaven, and I am on earth. I cannot pray, and yet, am I doing wrong? Am I doing wrong to try this cure on that fleeting, fading, struggling, agonizing life? Poor, pretty little Dorothy, she beats her wings against her cage. She longs to get out of this suffering, miserable state. Oh! I feel, down in my heart, that I can cure her. I trust, I hope, that her mother will allow me to try my cure."

Lady Sharpe looked so old on the following morning that her husband remarked it.

"If you go on at this rate," he said, "you will follow Dorothy very quickly to her grave. I wish the child was not so pig-headed about going abroad. I feel inclined to speak to her myself. If she knew how the whole affair is telling upon your health, she might be induced to rouse herself for her mother's sake."

"You must not say anything to her for the present, Probyn," said his wife. "Cecilia Digby's presence will, I am convinced, do her good."

Lady Sharpe could only pretend to eat breakfast that morning. Immediately afterward, she called Mrs. Digby into her boudoir.

"Don't ask me any questions," she said. "Get it done as soon as possible."

"You have decided?"

"Yes; don't ask me a single question. I have spent an awful night, but I have made up my mind."

"Dorothy must be told," said Cecilia.

"Come upstairs and tell her."

"She is almost safe to consent," continued Mrs. Digby. "There is one thing more that I must say. If the remedy takes effect, you must expect her to be worse for a day or two."

Lady Sharpe hesitated.

"The fact of her being worse will be a good symptom. To kill the tendency to this terrible disease, the poison must produce a certain effect upon her. It is absolutely necessary that no one but you, her mother, and Dorothy herself should know of what I am about to do. Dr. Arbuthnot has ordered her certain medicines, has he not?"

"Yes."

"While I am trying my remedy she must not take them. It is very probable that you will feel obliged to call him in. Let him come, by all means. I should rather like him to see her during the few days that the remedy is working. He will be able to report to us on the condition of her lungs. All you have to do, all Dorothy has to do, all I have to do, is to maintain absolute silence with regard to the course I am about to take. This must be clearly understood."

"Yes, Cecilia ; I will go through with it. I will lean absolutely upon you."

"If—if she dies?" said Cecilia, with white lips.

"We won't talk of that," said Lady Sharpe, shivering. "If she dies, you will leave my house, won't you? You will never look me in the face again. But even if she dies, I will not reveal what has happened."

"She will not die," said Cecilia, with sudden fervor ; "of that I feel convinced."

"I said last night you were an angel from Heaven."

"I don't like you to say things of that sort. You can scarcely comprehend what my feelings are."

"Yes, I can. If a mother can bring herself to run such a risk, surely she can understand the feelings of another placed in your circumstances."

"That is true. Well, I will go upstairs and prepare Dorothy."

"When her mind is made up," said Lady Sharpe, "it will not do to keep her long in suspense. Have you the remedy and directions with you?"

"I have everything with me. I can try the great experiment within an hour from the present time."

"Then God prosper you, Cecilia !"

Mrs. Digby left the room very quietly.

Dorothy was lying, calm and smiling, in her bed.

"I feel better this morning," she said to Cecilia. "The first thing I remembered when I woke was that you were in the house. You are my good angel, you know. You remind me of your husband."

"Dorothy," said Cecilia, "can you bear a great excitement?"

"Yes, yes, for I see hope in your face."

"I was speaking to your mother for a long time last night. I told her that I possess a certain knowledge, that I further possess a certain cure."

"Oh, your husband's cure?"

"My husband's cure."

"Then he did discover a cure? I was right?"

"He did."

"Why did he not try it on me?"

"Because of the great risk that attends it."

"What is that?"

"It may kill or cure."

"Kill?" Dorothy turned pale.

"It is this, darling. It may cure you absolutely, or it may hasten your death. I have full particulars with me. I can administer the cure to you without the slightest trouble, as surely and as effectually as my husband could, were he living. If it has the effect we anticipate, you will be well, absolutely quite well, in a month or six weeks."

"If it has not the effect?" asked Dorothy.

"In that case, your disease will grow rapidly, and you will die much sooner than you would if the medicine which I am about to use were not administered."

"If it cures me, can I marry?" asked Dorothy.

"You may safely marry. The remedy, when it is successful, is so potent that those whom it cures may as safely marry as those who never had the smallest tendency to consumption."

Dorothy's eyes sparkled.

"I love Frank," she said. "I want to think for a few minutes of a glad, beautiful future with him."

"You must face the other possibility too, Dorothy—the possibility of going down into your grave some months sooner than you might have gone."

"I know," said Dorothy. "You place before me a possible beautiful life, or a possible speedy death. I don't know that I want to linger on as I am doing now. If I stay in my present state I shall certainly die, shall I not?"

"That is true, dear."

"How soon?"

"I cannot tell you. I should imagine that, with care, you might live for nine or ten months longer, perhaps even for a year. At the same time, a chill, this inclement climate, a thousand chances, may make the disease in your lungs so much worse that your life will be over in a few weeks."

"And this cure of yours may also kill me in a few weeks?"

"You must certainly face this possibility."

"Will you go away, Cecilia, and come back again in half an hour?"

Cecilia left the room—she stood in the passage outside the door. She had made up her mind that if Dorothy consented to have the remedy tried upon her, she would administer it without delay.

"Suspense must be avoided at all risks," she said to herself. She felt calm now, untroubled. It seemed to her that she was doing right. For the time being she was unoppressed by forebodings. Nance's gay laugh was heard in the distance; Cecilia went along the corridor to meet her child, put her arms round her and kissed her.

"How is Dorothy?" asked the little girl.

"I want you to pray for Dolly, Nance."

"Yes, mother, I always pray for her. I love her very much. May I go to her now?"

"Not at present. Henny-Penny will take you for a walk, dearest. Don't forget what I asked you to do."

Cecilia returned again, to take up her place outside Dorothy's door. In a very short time the young girl rang her bell. Cecilia went into the room at once.

"I have made up my mind," said Dorothy, smiling. "I will take the risk."

"Very well," answered Cecilia. "Would you like your mother to be in the room?"

"No. I only want you. Is it a medicine that I am to take?"

"You will not take it in the ordinary way, Dorothy. I must inject something under your skin. The pain will be but a pin's prick. Keep up your courage, I will be with you again in a few minutes."

CHAPTER X.

VICTORY.

THAT night Miss Sharpe was flushed and feverish. Her heart beat quickly, her eyes were very bright. Shivering and fever had undoubtedly set in. Cecilia made the calmest, coolest, most admirable nurse.

"I should like to have the patient to myself," she said to Lady Sharpe. "The symptoms are exactly what they ought to be, but it would be well for Dr. Arbuthnot to see her."

The physician called about eight o'clock that evening and saw Dorothy.

Cecilia had taken off her widow's dress. She was in a soft gray gown, that made not the slightest noise as she walked about the room.

"Dorothy is very fond of me," she said to the doctor, "so I am going to nurse her for a few days."

Dr. Arbuthnot made an examination of his patient's lungs. Then he went downstairs with Lady Sharpe.

"I can't quite account for this fever," he said. "With such a temperature as Miss Sharpe has to-night, the mischief in her lungs ought to be more active than it was when last I sounded them; on the contrary——"

"Yes," asked Lady Sharpe, "on the contrary?"

"It has not advanced at all. If I might dare to say such a thing, her lungs seem somewhat better; not worse. I will come again in the morning."

After a day or two the fever symptoms abated. Cecilia waited a little longer, then she introduced a fresh supply of the remedy under the patient's skin. There was again fever, but not so acute. Dr. Arbuthnot called daily. Dorothy's condition plainly puzzled him. He wondered if there was anything wrong with the drains of the house. He could not understand this relapsing fever. He was more anxious than ever that his patient should get out of London.

The third dose of the poison produced scarcely any disturbance of the system. Cecilia then said she could do no more.

"It is my firm impression that you are cured, Dorothy," she said. "These, however, are early days to decide. I would rather no physician sounded your lungs for two or three weeks, but I should be very glad if you would come with me to Torquay."

It was one thing for Dorothy Sharpe to think of leaving home as a helpless invalid, another to go away with the strong assurance that she was practically cured.

The weight of care which had oppressed her young spirits vanished almost immediately after Cecilia had worked her wonderful cure upon her. She looked once more like the old Dorothy. Her eyes were bright with the gleam of returning health. Her cheeks had color in them, but that color was not caused by the hectic of fever.

The reaction from the lowest spirits to great gayety of

heart made her almost childish in her mirth. Nance became again her favorite companion, and the two had many a merry time together.

The removal to Torquay took place soon after Christmas. Cecilia and Nance accompanied Lady Sharpe and Dorothy. It was February when they returned once more to town.

On a certain snowy morning, Dr. Arbuthnot was told that Lady Sharpe and Miss Sharpe had called to see him. He uttered an angry exclamation half under his breath.

"The madness of that woman!" he said to himself, "bringing a delicate girl out on a day like this!"

"I will see Lady Sharpe at once, Andrews," he said to his servant.

The mother and daughter entered the consulting room.

Where was the Dorothy of old? the drooping, downcast, excitable, despondent creature?

Dr. Arbuthnot almost failed to recognize her in the blooming, handsome, upright girl who stood before him.

"My dear Miss Sharpe," he exclaimed in unfeigned delight, wringing her hand as he spoke, "you look well—absolutely well! What wonders Torquay has done for you! Catch me ever sending a patient out of England again. Pray take a chair, Lady Sharpe. Will you sit on the sofa, Miss Dorothy? Yes, you are better; I can see that fact by your eyes alone. But what, in the name of fortune, brought you out on a day like this?"

Lady Sharpe began to speak in a trembling and somewhat agitated manner.

"The fact is," she said, "the cold does not seem to influence Dorothy at all now. Ever since those feverish attacks in December when you attended her, Dr. Arbuthnot, she has been getting steadily better."

"Better? I grant you she is better, but her lungs will require care—they will continue to require care during the rest of her life. What about her cough and her appetite? Does she still suffer from great fatigue?"

"Her cough is gone, her appetite was never better, she sleeps well, and I don't think she is ever tired."

"I feel as if I wanted to fly," said Dorothy. "People don't want to fly if they are tired, do they, Dr. Arbuthnot?"

"Except to fly away, my dear young lady. Come, come, this is a wonderful account you and your mother are giving me. I must listen to your lungs without delay."

Dr. Arbuthnot made no remark while he made his careful examination. At last it was over. He sat down by his writing table, and opening the large book in which he recorded particulars of his cases, made some rather long entries.

Dorothy stood before him with a fast beating heart. Lady Sharpe sat in her chair and trembled.

"Well?" said the mother at last.

"Am I better?" asked the daughter.

"Better?" The doctor raised his shaggy eyebrows, and fixed his eyes on the girl's beautiful, blushing face. "You are very, very much better, Miss Sharpe," he said. "In short, you are——"

"Oh, do say it! Please don't hesitate if it is true. Am I cured?"

"Practically you are cured. The disease in your lungs has been completely arrested. The patches of tubercle have dried up. It is marvelous, incomprehensible! I could not have believed the recovery you have made possible when I examined your lungs two months ago."

"Is the disease likely to return?" asked Lady Sharpe.

"I see no reason why it should. All Miss Sharpe's symptoms point to returning health. She has put on flesh, she has gained color. Her digestion seems excellent. You tell me she sleeps well, eats well, that she does not cough, and is never tired. What more can any young lady want to complete her bill of health?"

"Then, Dr. Arbuthnot——" Lady Sharpe raised her eyes, full of speech, to the physician's face.

"I know to what you allude, my dear madam," he replied. "By all means. There is nothing whatever to prevent it. Nothing whatever. I congratulate you, Miss Dorothy, from the bottom of my heart. I should like to see you again in a fortnight. Just for my own satisfaction: not that there is the least need."

Lady Sharpe and her daughter returned home. They went straight into Lady Sharpe's boudoir, where Cecilia was waiting to hear Dr. Arbuthnot's verdict.

"It is all right, my dear," said the good lady, going up to Mrs. Digby and embracing her. "You have proved yourself what I said you were long ago—an angel sent to us straight from Heaven."

Cecilia began to tremble very much. She did not cry, but

her eyes grew dim. She turned away and walked abruptly to the window.

"Your praise pains me," she said, suddenly turning round. "You don't know what a weight I carry forever at my heart. I have done right—I must have done right—in administering the remedy to Dorothy which has effected her cure, but, although I have done right, I feel as if I had committed a sin. You know why I say this, you know my reasons. Now let us forget the cure. Don't thank me any more, I beg of you."

"No, Cecilia, I will not thank you," said Lady Sharpe gravely. "I will do nothing whatever to cause you a moment's pain, my dearest and best friend. But, at the same time, I must say I think you will do distinctly wrong if you hide this remedy from the world. Your husband told you to take the papers to Dr. Dickinson. I am sure your plain duty is to do so, and to tell him frankly that you were tempted to try the experiment both on yourself and on Dorothy, and in both instances with marked success."

Cecilia turned paler than before; she did not speak.

"You will do this, my dear?" said Lady Sharpe.

"I will think over what you say," she answered, in a guarded voice, and the conversation drifted into ordinary channels.

Soon there was a sound of an arrival. A slight commotion in the hall, steps coming quickly up the stairs, and Crichton, his face radiant, entered the boudoir.

Dorothy gave a slight cry when she saw him.

"What is this news?" he exclaimed. "I have just come from Dr. Arbuthnot. He has told me something absolutely marvelous, miraculous. Is it true? Can it be true?"

"Look for yourself," said Lady Sharpe, going up to her blushing daughter and taking her hand.

"Are you really well, Dorothy?" asked the young man.

"I never felt better in my life."

"You look well. Do you remember the picnic on the Thames? You seemed in good health then, but now your eyes have a brightness, your whole face has the expression, which testifies to vigorous health. Who has done it, Dorothy? This is—this is a miracle!"

Dorothy looked round. Her impulse was to thank Cecilia, but Cecilia had vanished; Lady Sharpe had also left the room.

"Who has been your physician? Someone has laid the balm of healing on you. Can I forget what you looked like on that cruel, cruel day when I saw you last?"

"I was dying," said Dorothy. "My body was falling away, my mind was getting proportionately weak, my spirit was weighed down by fear and unhappiness. You must forget that day, Frank."

"Frank!" exclaimed the young man. "Will you really call me Frank?"

"Yes, yes."

"Then that means——"

"It means what you like," said Dorothy. She raised her eyes quickly for an instant; they drooped the next moment under Crichton's ardent gaze.

"Arbuthnot spoke the truth," he exclaimed in rapture. "We can be married, we can be the very happiest couple in the world. Dorothy, my dear, I am a medical man. This marvelous cure could not have been effected without means. Who is at the bottom of it? Surely, surely not poor old Arbuthnot?"

"Frank," said Dorothy suddenly, "I am, as you see me, perfectly well. I have neither ache nor pain. I am willing to become your wife whenever you are ready to marry me, but if you take me, Frank, you must do so with one stipulation."

"Anything, my dearest. Anything in the wide world, only to win you."

"You must never ask me by what means I have been made well."

"But this is——"

"Promise, Frank. There must be one secret between us, but only one. Be satisfied that something has happened so good and so wonderful that, instead of my going down into the cold grave, I am coming to you with my heart full of love and my body strong and healthy in every particular; but I cannot tell you how this thing has happened, Frank. You must not ask me."

Crichton's face grew dark with anxiety for a moment, then it cleared. His own unexpected happiness was too absorbing for anything to greatly trouble him just then. But not the less did he ponder over Dorothy's strange words, and not the less curious was he to know the reason of her wonderful restoration to health.

Book V.—The Valley of the Shadow.

CHAPTER I.

MAN AGAINST WOMAN.

CECILIA returned to the country. Miss Timmins was glad to have her back again, but she noticed a change in her, which soon proclaimed itself in actions.

"Aunt Abigail," said Mrs. Digby, "I am anxious to give up this house ; I want to live in town."

"I thought as much, my love," replied Miss Timmins.

"Yes," said Cecilia, "I should like to go to London ; I should be very glad also if you would come and live with me."

"I think not, my dear. My own little cottage at Highgate still awaits me."

"It must be as you please, Aunt Abigail. I say with truth that it would give me pleasure if you continued to live with Nance and me, but you must do exactly as you like."

"I would do anything in the world for your real good, Cecilia, but I am no longer necessary to you. I must say frankly, therefore, that London air never suited me. My cough is only a throat cough, but it gets worse and more irritable when I breathe the air which pervades the great metropolis. I should prefer to stay in the country, my dear ; but I promise to come to you day or night if need should arise."

"Very well, Aunt Abigail, it must be as you wish."

Cecilia went into town two days later, and took lodgings for herself and Nance. She was now, in every sense of the word, a poor woman. There were some who would have made her otherwise—Dr. Phillips would have bought her secret from her at a great price, and Lady Sharpe would have paid her any sum in reason for the cure she had effected on Dorothy ; but Cecilia would not sell her secret, nor would she take money for Dorothy's recovery. She said, and very truly, that

wealth had no charms for her ; her wants were few, and there was a part of London where she could live even on an income which did not reach £200 a year.

Cecilia took lodgings for herself and Nance in Bloomsbury. Henny-Penny went with them, but Sally Jenkins was no longer needed. Cecilia's rooms were unfurnished. They consisted of two or three large rooms on the top story of an old-fashioned house. The rooms were lofty and had plenty of air in them. Cecilia took some pains with regard to their furnishing. She had a small sum which was not invested for her, and with this she bought certain things which would not usually become part of a lady's requirements. The largest sitting room was fitted up with her husband's books, his large secretary, and one or two other strange looking articles of furniture which outsiders knew nothing about. One of these happened to be an incubator. Cecilia told no one why she required it. She kept the door of that sitting room locked, and dusted it and cleaned it herself. Even Nance was never allowed to enter this room.

Soon after her arrival with her little daughter in these London lodgings, she went out and paid a visit to the nearest clergyman. She told him part of her story, only a part. He took an interest in her—it was very usual for poor Cecilia to arouse this feeling in her fellow creatures—and she asked him to let her work among his poor as a district visitor.

He was only too glad to give her permission to do so. She was given a large district to visit, and from that moment her life became a very busy one. In the morning she taught Nance herself. The little girl was growing up stronger than anyone had anticipated who had seen her a year or so before. In the afternoon Cecilia visited her district, in the evening she read to Nance, talked to her, petted her, and saw her to bed ; then, while the child slept, the mother would spend long hours, very long hours, far into the night in that mysterious sitting room which no one ever entered but herself.

About two or three in the morning she would go upstairs to bed, creeping up stair after stair with a weary look on her white face. The sleep which followed those long night vigils was troubled and broken. It came in fits, and would abruptly terminate by sharp cries which would frighten Nance, who would awake suddenly and ask her mother what was the matter.

“Nothing, my darling,” Cecilia would always say ; and the

child would give her a passionate hug, and turn away with a feeling she could not account for in her little heart.

Mrs. Digby became popular in her district ; in some parts of it she became very popular. As she walked down the narrow and dirty streets, some women and some men would regard her, as she passed slowly through their midst, with almost reverence. Some women would call blessings after her, and would even whisper mysteriously together about her. She was spoken of as the strange lady who had a secret that acted like magic—a secret that no one must speak about, but which many within that poor, squalid district were too thankful to avail themselves of.

Many months passed away, and Cecilia was still loved and blessed in her district ; but suddenly there came a different note, striking discord into the universal psalm of blessing.

There was one woman who shrieked when she saw Cecilia, shrieked, turned away, and rushed into her own house. She did this several times. At last she was removed to an asylum—the neighbors said she was mad; they also muttered one to another that this madness had visited her after the death of her only son. He was eighteen years of age, and had died of very rapid consumption. Mrs. Digby had visited him when she visited other consumptive patients. She had a wonderful cure for consumption, the neighbors said; it had saved lots of people whom the doctors had given over. The people supposed that Mrs. Digby had tried the remedy on Ralph Danby, but Ralph Danby had not recovered; on the contrary, he had died very quickly, and after his death his mother had taken to cursing Cecilia, and then had gone suddenly off her head.

Cecilia looked years older after this event, but in the quiet lodgings where she lived there was no one to notice the changes in her face, the gray hairs on her head, the wrinkles round her eyes, except Nance, and Nance never spoke of what was in her heart.

Dorothy Sharpe was now a happy wife. She was restored to perfect health, and the old gayety and buoyancy of heart which had so characterized her early youth returned to her.

She and her husband lived in the Digbys' old house. It was once more bright with flowers and and gay with pleasant life.

Crichton had not Digby's abilities, but in his line he was also a clever man, well spoken of in the profession, and likely to rise to a moderate eminence by and by.

The Phillipses and Crichtons lived on friendly terms with each other, and Dorothy, when she had nothing better to do, liked to sit with Helen Phillips and talk to her of the old days. The Digbys were a favorite theme for conversation between these two; they had both loved Digby, and they both regarded his wife with affection.

One hot summer's day the two young women were sitting side by side near one of the open windows, when Phillips entered the room.

"Don't let me interrupt your talk," he said to them. "I heard a name on your lips as I came into the room; that name interests me—you were speaking of poor Digby?"

"No," said Dorothy, "we were not. Helen was just telling me something about his wife."

"Well, it is all the same. Digby's wife seems part of him to a remarkable degree; I don't mind admitting that her name interests me even more than her husband's. She is alive, he is dead. She was always a remarkable woman. Can you tell me, Mrs. Crichton, why it is we have quite lost sight of her?"

"It is natural for her not to care to come here," answered Dorothy. "The house that my husband and I live in must be full of painful associations for Cecilia. I can understand her reluctance to visit us."

"It is a pity," returned Phillips; "those morbid feelings ought always to be combated. Natural, no doubt, they are, but Mrs. Digby is a wise woman—she has intelligence beyond the average: she ought to use it to conquer herself."

"I never knew anyone conquer herself more effectually than Cecilia," replied Dorothy. "For my part, I have only one complaint to make against her, and that is her reluctance to allow Nance to visit us."

Phillips walked over to the mantelpiece and leaned against it. He was still a very handsome man, but there were lines of discontent round his eyes and lips.

"I agree with you," he said, after a pause. "Little Nance Digby ought to have many friends: her mother makes a mistake in rejecting the kindly feeling that those who knew her father would gladly extend to her. My wife and I, for instance, have a very great affection for Nance."

"And so have I," said Dorothy. She moved restlessly. "There is no use discussing the matter," she continued; "Cecilia has her own views, and she is a determined woman. You may suppose," she added, with a burst of feeling, "that if you are willing to do all in your power for little Nance, my husband and I are even more anxious to befriend her. We owe her mother so much, so very much." Dorothy colored and paused abruptly.

Phillips gave her a quick glance, then his eyes drooped; she had caught an eager gleam in them, and hastened to turn the conversation.

"One moment before we talk on other matters," said Phillips. "Mrs. Digby has her own reasons for wishing to live a life of retirement, but I cannot understand her strange wish to cut herself off from all her old friends. Neither the Lancasters, nor Helen and I, even know her present address."

"It is very wrong of Cecilia," said Helen, "to keep herself so completely in the background. I have only seen her three times since her husband's death—once in the country and twice at my mother's—and she has positively refused, on the two occasions when we met her at Harford Square, to tell us where she lived."

"She had good reasons, no doubt," Dorothy replied.

"You know her address, Mrs. Crichton, don't you?" asked Phillips.

"I do."

Phillips paused again; his next remark came out with a certain hesitation.

"Would it be a great breach of trust to give it to me?" he asked then.

"It would," she replied, with a flash in her eyes. "If you like to write to her I will forward your letter; if you wish, also, I will write and ask her if she has any objection to seeing you. You cannot expect me to do more."

"I cannot," he answered, in a penitent tone. "I really do want to see Mrs. Digby on a special matter in which I can render her material assistance. You must forgive my asking an indiscreet question. I only did it out of zeal for our mutual friend."

Phillips soon after left the room, and Helen, after a brief pause, turned and spoke in a low voice to Dorothy.

"Do you know," she said, "that there are very strange rumors afloat about Cecilia?"

"I never believe rumors," replied Dorothy, in a constrained voice.

"You must at least have heard of these," said Helen. "They have reached us through more than one source. You know that James sees poor patients for an hour on two mornings in the week. Some of them come from the neighborhood where Cecilia lives. We have a new housemaid, too, who has heard of her."

Dorothy rose from her seat. "Whatever you may have heard, Helen," she said, "you may be quite sure that Cecilia's deeds belong to the light. She has her own reasons for not talking about the way in which she spends her time, but I think that we who love her ought to trust her."

"Of course I trust her," replied Helen, "but the fact is my husband doesn't. I don't mind telling you in confidence, Dorothy, that I fail utterly to comprehend James's attitude toward Cecilia. He admires her very much, but he likes to hear things against her. He is eager about these rumors, he is anxious to get all the information in his power with regard to them."

"Will you tell me exactly what is said about Mrs. Digby?"

"I will tell you, for I know you won't make mischief. Cecilia has a district of very poor people near Bloomsbury. She visits her district daily, going from house to house with books and medicines and nourishment, and all those little things that the sick poor value."

"The rumors seem commonplace," said Dorothy. "Cecilia is a model district visitor. Why not?"

"But she does more," proceeded Helen, lowering her voice. "The doctors order certain medicines, and Cecilia throws them away; the doctors give up certain patients, and Cecilia cures them. Nobody knows what she does, but the people who have been almost dying get well. Our servant—Rhoda is her name—gives a wonderful account of her little brother's recovery; he had got some affection of the bones, which caused most intense and painful inflammation. He was sent to one hospital and another, and the doctors had a very bad opinion of him. Cecilia saw him and took him in hand, and now he is well, quite well and strong. Rhoda blesses Mrs. Digby, and says that she and hers look upon her as an angel of light. But in other cases she has not been so successful. What does she do? Is there the slightest truth in the rumors

which grow and grow, and which reach even us? What is the matter, Dorothy? How pale you look."

"I will tell you why I look pale," retorted Dorothy. "Because Cecilia Digby is giving up her entire life to a noble cause, and she is going to be basely misunderstood. Helen, you must crush those rumors; they bode no good whatever to our friend."

Dorothy soon afterward went away, and Phillips returned to the drawing room and began to talk to his wife.

"Well," he said, "did you speak of the rumors to Mrs. Crichton?"

"I did," she replied, glancing at him timidly. "Dorothy seemed displeased and a little—a little put out."

"She didn't deny them, however?"

"How could she? Cecilia does spend all her time in doing good. James, I want to say something. I won't go on with this."

"Won't go on with what, my dear?"

"I won't act the spy any longer. You want me to ferret out things about Cecilia. I refuse to be your tool. Can't you let my cousin alone? What matter how she spends her time? It is no affair of ours."

Phillips gazed steadily at his wife for half a minute. Her little flash of bravery was quickly quenched by his glance.

"You can do as you please," he said coldly. "I believe I can obtain the information that I require without any further help from you."

He went down to his consulting room, murmuring some ugly words under his breath.

"One thing is quite plain," he said presently, half aloud. "Cecilia Digby has read her husband's papers to some purpose, and is using his remedy for consumption with marked success in her district. Such a remedy in a woman's hands is highly dangerous! Her conduct is mad. Oh! what might not Mrs. Crichton reveal if she chose? She would have been in her grave by now but for—but for that marvelous discovery which ought to be mine. I am convinced of this fact, although Crichton reveals nothing. Perhaps he knows nothing. Once I tried to question him, but I quickly saw it was a subject into which he would not enter. I think I have got a clew to Mrs. Digby's address. I will go to see her tomorrow or next day. This discovery must be taken from

her; by main force, if necessary. Now then, what are the odds? A man with money and average brains, and a woman with no money, but brains far above those usually given to her sex. I expect the odds are pretty even. Man against woman: who will win?"

CHAPTER II.

ONE WOMAN'S CURSE.

MRS. CRICHTON, in the softest and prettiest summer costume, sat in her open carriage, and desired her coachman to drive her to a certain part of Bloomsbury. She got out at the top of a long street, took a basket from the carriage, desired her servants to come to the same spot and fetch her in two hours from now, and walked down the street with a quick, light step.

Presently she found herself standing in the porch of a tall, old-fashioned house. A woman of the usual landlady type opened the door. Dorothy smiled at her as if she was an old friend, and ran quickly up the stairs of the old house to the top story.

She turned the handle of a door which directly faced the stairs, and entered a low, long, and pleasantly furnished sitting room. One of the windows was open, and the air that came in was fresh, for it blew over the tops of the opposite houses and brought a faint touch of the distant country on its wings.

A child sat by the open window—a tall, pale child. She had a mass of sunny hair falling down her back, and her gray eyes had a bright, sweet, and yet pathetic expression. Her little mouth had patient curves about it. Her somewhat hollow cheeks brightened when she saw Mrs. Crichton. She sprang up from her seat by the window, rushed to her, and kissed her affectionately.

"Mother is out," said Nance, "but I expect her back every moment. I am so very, very glad that you have come, Dorothy."

"Why are you here by yourself, Nance? I thought you and Henny-Penny were inseparables."

"Oh, no! I am too old to have a nurse with me now, am I not? Henny-Penny has gone away."

"My dear Nance!"

"You need not pity me, Dorothy; I think I rather like it. It was I who asked mother to send her away. She was rather a trouble to mother lately."

"Why so?"

Nance lowered her tone.

"She began to ask questions about the cures," she said.

"I always expected her to do that," said Dorothy, seating herself near the child. "But she would be sure to take your mother's part."

"Oh yes, oh yes. She loved mother, but she didn't understand her. She used to go downstairs, and Mrs. Morton, our landlady, spoke about funny rumors, and about mother being quite the best doctor in the neighborhood; and Henny-Penny used to get a sharp look on her face, and she *would speak* to mother about what was said, although I begged of her not, and mother got worried and anxious. At last we gave poor Henny-Penny a present, and told her she might go back to the country. I don't suppose she will ever come to London again. I do miss her, of course, but I don't let mother see it."

"It is very bad for you to be alone, Nance," said Dorothy. "If your mother is out most of the day, will she not let you come and pay me a visit?"

"I could not do that, Dorothy. I am not really lonely, and I would not leave my mother for the world. I always do my best to distract her mind from her cures, and I have made up a jolly plan lately. I find it does her heaps of good."

"What is your plan, darling?"

"I make up a story every day while mother is out, and I tell it to her each evening after tea. I have a lot to do in making up a fresh story every day, for you know the kind of stories that mother ought to hear are a little difficult—I have to avoid so many things."

"What do you mean?"

"Can't you understand? I must on no account speak about sick people, or doctors, or medicines, or any of the things that I know most about. You see, what I want to do is to turn mother's thoughts away from the things she is doing all day, and from the things she is studying all night; and as I am really very ignorant it isn't easy."

"I shouldn't think it was. How is it possible for your thoughts to have a wide range, shut up here all by yourself, you poor little white flower?"

"I never had much color, you know that, Dorothy; but I am perfectly well and strong. I am not the least bit of anxiety to my mother, and nothing makes me so glad as to think of that; for you remember, Dolly, when father went away

that time he told me I was to take care of mother, and it is the greatest possible comfort to feel that I am obeying father."

Dorothy rose from her chair and looked out of the window.

"All the same, it is a very bad life for you, dear," she said. "I must try and persuade your mother to let you come and pay me a visit. I won't keep you long ; but when I get you to my house I am going to give you heaps of new ideas for your stories, and brighten you up in every way. There, don't pucker your poor little brows ; I won't worry you about it at this moment. I am going to stay with you quite a long time this afternoon. See what I have brought with me. Lovely flowers, are they not ? and these are strawberries, and here is cream—I mean to have tea with you and mother presently—oh ! and here is a parcel quite for you alone."

"A parcel ! I love parcels ! What can be in it ?"

"Don't open it until I have gone. You will find new books, a fresh box of colors, and some sheets of drawing paper, that is all. By the way, Nance, you are not giving up your music ?"

"I play my violin sometimes ; but mother doesn't care to listen to it. I used to love music more than anything else in the world, but now I make up stories and draw pictures. I have given mother a great many pictures to pin up in her room lately."

"Well, don't get that sad look on your face ; let us have a cheerful time, and talk together as if we were children. Don't you remember when you and I used to play at being the same age long ago ?"

"Yes ; it is a very long time ago, isn't it ?"

"I suppose it is ; although it doesn't seem long to me."

"It does to me. That was before the thing happened that cut my life in two. There came a dreadful day when everything changed and something went out of my life. I am not really sad, but I am different ; that is all. Dorothy, do you know that father's beautiful picture is gone ?"

"Your father's portrait, my dear ? The one painted by Millais ?"

"Yes, that beautiful, beautiful picture. It used to hang over the mantelpiece, and I had lots of comfort from it. Whenever I wanted to know exactly what to do, I used to look at the picture, and it seemed as if father was speaking to me. Well, it's gone now ; mother has put it away. It was my

fault, too, and I am rather unhappy about it, though I try not to be."

"Don't cry, Nance dear," said Dorothy. "I cannot understand your mother not wishing to have that portrait always close to her."

"It was my fault," continued Nance. "I was looking at it one day when mother came into the room. She came up and saw me; I didn't want her to; I used always to keep my eyes turned away from it when she was by; but she saw me that time, and her face got very, very white, although she didn't speak a word. The next morning when I came downstairs the picture was gone. I don't dare to say anything to mother, but I do miss it!"

"Of course you do, you poor little darling. Nance, my dear, when your mother comes in I mean to have a long talk with her. Do you mind leaving us together for a little?"

"No, I can go up to my room and make up my story for to-night. I haven't finished it yet. It is so difficult to tell the sort of story that exactly suits mother."

"Tell me how you manage. I would give anything to make up stories. How do you set about yours?"

"I sit by the window and watch the people as they pass by. There is one very nice looking old gentleman who walks down the street every morning about ten o'clock. He has gray hair, and a gold watch chain, and a long black coat. I have put him into lots of my stories. Sometimes a pretty girl goes by, but not often. There is one I know pretty well by this time. She has brown hair and a rather pale but nice face. She is in the story too; I have made her into a sort of governess, and she is very poor, and she has a little sister at home who loves her very much. She and the little sister are quite well—it would never do to make them ill, only sometimes I do want to give the little girl a cold, but I daren't. Mother always gets that frown between her eyes if I do. Then, of course, I have a young man in the story. He is like cousin George, rather jolly, and with a red face. He is not handsome a bit, but mother always laughs when I talk about him, so I use him in most of my stories, for it is most important to make mother laugh. I have a little girl, too; but I have almost used her up. She has black hair and black eyes, she is very mischievous, and she hates her lessons. She is quite a naughty kind of little girl, and the young man with red hair is her uncle, and the pale, pretty girl teaches her, and, and——"

You can see for yourself, Dorothy, that my stories are monotonous, for I have the same old man, and the same young man, and the same pretty big girl and the same naughty little girl in every story, and I am dreadfully afraid that mother will get tired of them at last."

"Let us think of some fresh characters," said Dorothy. "We might have——"

"That is mother's step on the stairs," said Nance. "I am so glad ; I thought she would be home early."

Nance rushed to the sitting room door and threw it open. Mrs. Digby, dressed quietly in gray, entered the room. It was more than a year now since she had left off her widow's mourning. She had been censured for this act among her friends, but Cecilia Digby had long ago passed the point that regards censure with uneasiness. Her face was too pale to suit the color which she wore, but on seeing Dorothy it brightened visibly, some of the old loveliness returned to it, she looked ten years younger, and the voice in which she spoke was both strong and cheerful.

"How nice you look, Cecilia !" exclaimed Dorothy, kissing her friend with much affection.

Mrs. Digby laughed.

"As to my looking nice," she said, "that is neither here nor there. I have no doubt that I look what I feel—quite well. No, I don't notice the heat. Perhaps it is because I take everything quietly. I take things very quietly now." She suppressed a sigh, and turned to smile down on her little daughter.

Nance Digby's gray eyes were fixed upon her mother's face as if she would read her innermost soul. When the mother smiled, the child began to dance lightly about the room.

"Dolly is going to stay to tea," she said. "She has brought cream and strawberries ; and mother, mother, do look at these lovely flowers ! I have a parcel here, too, mother. I haven't opened it yet, but Dolly says there are two new books inside, and a fresh box of colors, and some drawing paper. Isn't it lovely ?"

"Yes, my sweet, anything is more than lovely that brings such smiles to your face. Is it true, Dorothy, that you are going to stay to tea with us ?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Crichton, "I am going to give myself that pleasure. The strawberries and cream have really been brought for my selfish gratification. Cecilia, dear, will you

please take that chair by the open window—just here, where you can feel the fresh breeze, and Nance and I, who have been absolutely lazy for the last half hour, will bustle about and get you a nice cup of tea.”

Cecilia smiled again. She sat down at once in the chair indicated, unfastened her bonnet strings, and, taking off her bonnet, laid it on the table which stood near. She also loosened the long, plain gray cloak which she wore over her gray dress, and letting it drop from her shoulders, lay back in the deep chair and watched, with a face full of peace, the active movements of Dorothy and little Nance.

Mrs. Digby looked older than her years, but still hers was the sort of face that men would turn and look at twice ; that women would watch and smile at, and gradually open strange confidences to : for the face retained all its old sweetness, and to that look of sweetness was added now one of high resolve and even power.

The light in her eyes to-night was almost happy. The sadness that lingered round her lips added a touch of pathos to her strange beauty. Cecilia's was the loveliness of soul, for her faded color, the hollows in her cheeks, the slight irregularity of her features, quite shut her out from the mere beauty of form.

When tea was over, Nance went to her own bedroom, hugging Dorothy's parcel in her arms. The moment she left the room Mrs. Crichton pulled a low chair forward and sat down at Cecilia's feet.

“Now, Cecil,” she began, “I am going to be quite plain, and even blunt, with you.”

Cecilia slightly winced.

“Bluntness is another word for pain,” she said. “I feel quite strong and happy at the present moment. Must you give me pain to-day, Dolly? Yes, I see by your face that you must. It is something like telling a patient that the surgeon's knife is to be used on him. Are you quite inexorable?”

“Yes, quite, for the operation is necessary.” Dorothy's voice slightly trembled. “But I will be very quick about it,” she added. “If I could apply chloroform I would, but as I can't do that, I promise to be very expeditious in cutting off the limb.”

“Begin, begin,” said Cecilia, patting her knees restlessly. “To a certain extent I always live over a precipice. Take the ground from under my feet, Dolly, if you must.”

"What a lot of metaphors we employ," said Dorothy, with a smile that quickly faded. "O Cecilia, if there is anything in the wide world that I hate, it is the thought of giving you pain. You know that, don't you?"

"I do, perfectly well."

"And this will give you pain, but it is what we always expected. Cecilia, what we so often feared might happen has happened. You are being talked about. I was at the Phillipses' yesterday. Dr. Phillips came into the room; he spoke of you, and begged me to give him your address."

"You would never do that, Dorothy?" replied Mrs. Digby.

"Need you ask? I think I hate Dr. Phillips just as cordially as you ever did."

Cecilia's long, thin hand touched Dorothy's shoulder for half a minute. She drew it away quickly.

"If there is one thing I struggle for," she said, "it is complete self-repression. When I think of what I was in the old days and what I now am, I believe that one day I shall succeed."

"Why should you succeed, Cecil? Why should you crush and starve and hide away that great heart which God has put into your breast? Dear Cecilia, I hate myself for coming to you with counsel, to you who have saved me. But I must give you advice to-day. I must warn you that you are in danger. You are playing with edged tools. Dr. Phillips is a very dangerous man. He knows too much already; rumors have reached him."

"About me?"

"Yes; about you and the—the cure. A servant, called Rhoda Parsons, has gone to live at the Phillipses'. You saved the life of this girl's little brother after all the doctors had given him up. Rhoda promised secrecy, of course, but she has not kept her word. How pale you look, Cecilia!"

"I am no paler than usual, Dorothy. Go on. What else have you heard?"

"A man came to see Dr. Phillips—you know he sees poor people twice a week for an hour in the morning. This man came, too, from your district. He also spoke of you and your cure. I could not find out his name."

"The name does not matter," said Mrs. Digby. She turned slightly away from Dorothy, and gazed out of the window. Her eyes, rather sunken in her head, looked dark. Some

emotion evidently stirred them. Otherwise her face was perfectly passive. After a pause, she turned again to Dorothy.

"You said you would use the knife, and without chloroform," she said. "Go on. What else have you heard of me?"

"Not much else. You are a mystery to your friends, and you use a remedy unknown to the doctors, which works miracles, which raises the dying to life."

"That is certainly true in some cases," said Cecilia, in a low voice. "A fortnight ago a little boy was brought back from the London Hospital. His mother cried and wrung her hands; she came to me in a frantic state. I saw the child, and satisfied myself with regard to the nature of his complaint. He was suffering from one of the most painful forms which tubercular affection can take—an inflammatory condition of the bones. The child lived a life of torture. It is against the canons of our Christian religion to put human beings out of their misery. They must live on, in whatever state of suffering, until kind death releases them. The doctors had doomed this child to die, but kind Death was in no hurry for his prey. He would torture his victim as the cat does the mouse. The moment of release would come some day, but not yet.

"The little victim was seven years old. He was a very pretty child—his mother had no other.

"She went on her knees to me, she took the skirts of the dress I am wearing and kissed them, and asked me to help her. I did not refuse, but I told her, for the sake of others, she must take the necessary oath of secrecy. She hesitated, looked frightened. They all fear that oath before they take it—would that it were unnecessary! In the end she yielded. She swore on the Bible that she would never reveal my secret to living soul. I injected the first dose of the lymph under the child's skin that evening."

"Yes, Cecilia; and what happened?"

"The happiest results. I have come from the child's bedside now. His little baby lips kissed me, and I heard his laugh as I went downstairs. Try to imagine my feelings. Instead of a scream of agony, a gay laugh of pure joy came from those little lungs. I have injected the lymph now four times. The child grows better every day. The pains have almost disappeared."

"Cecilia, I always knew you were a very noble woman."

"I don't like you to say that. I have disobeyed my husband. I have dared to do what he would not attempt. He saw the danger, and stopped on the threshold. I, too, have seen danger, but I have ventured on. I feel like a woman with a mission. Each day I believe more fully in the remedy my husband has discovered. Come what will, now I must continue to use it."

"In every case, Cecilia, has the remedy proved successful?"

"No; and there my trouble lies. In some cases it has had little or no effect; in others it has only produced a partial cure. In others, again, it has appeared to work wonders for a time, but the disease has broken out with fresh violence by and by. There is one very dark and sorrowful case about which I hate to think. The young man was consumptive. Perhaps he was too far gone in consumption. I administered the remedy. He grew worse, distinctly worse. He died suddenly. His mother was quite certain, when she took the oath of secrecy, that her son would be restored to her. After the breath had left his body, she took me into the room where he lay and bade me look at him, and then she cursed me. It was very horrible. Afterward she went off her head—poor, poor soul!"

"But, Cecilia, does not such a circumstance frighten you?"

"It does, Dorothy; it frightens me dreadfully."

"But still you go on?"

"Still I go on."

"Because?"

"Because the cases of cure are many; the cases of relief many. Up to the present this is the one solitary instance in which my husband's remedy has acted as a distinct poison, and hastened death."

"That woman's curse seems very dreadful to me," said Dorothy; "I wonder that you can go on."

"Has a medical man, with full diplomas from schools of surgery and medicine, never made a mistake? He uses his favorite drug—it saves in one case, in another it only increases the mischief. He goes on, he still believes in the medicine. He takes extra care, that is all. So will I go on, with extra care."

"Cecilia, you may be as angry with me as you please, but I am quite certain that you are not doing right. No one

knows better than I the potency of your medicine, but it is dangerous of you to use it too often. A day may come when other women may curse you. I don't think I could live under a curse. I don't think you could hold up your head under many, Cecilia. Why don't you take your remedy to Dr. Dickinson? Why don't you obey your husband's dying directions?"

"You must not speak to me now of my husband's dying words; it is too late."

"It is never too late to do what is right."

"Yes, in this case it is quite; it is too late now. If I took the papers to Dr. Dickinson he would shut them away in his drawer; he would discredit my stories; suffering would go on; the majority would still die; the remedy would lie useless. I know this, Dorothy. It is useless for you to argue the point with me. The one case of poor Ralph Danby's death would be thought more of than the fifty cases of whole or partial cure. I dare not run the risk; I must go on helping people to the best of my lights. When my own husband, one of the most enlightened and foremost men of the day, feared to use the discovery he himself had made, how do you think Dr. Dickinson will treat it? Enough, Dorothy; my mind is made up."

"I won't tempt you any more. How tired, how very tired, you look."

"I feel tired. I have the sensation of every nerve being too tightly strung. Now, let us descend to commonplace."

"In a moment we will. One question first. Are you not afraid of Dr. Phillips?"

"He cannot possibly do me any harm. I do not wish to be worried by him, so I keep my address a secret."

"I am not sure that he cannot harm you, Cecil. He would if he could."

"He would if he could," replied Mrs. Digby.

"Suppose he hears of the death of that poor young man, and of the mother going out of her mind?"

"Even so, I do not think I shall fear him."

Cecilia rose from her chair as she spoke.

"I refuse to say another word on the subject of my cure," she said. "Now I want to make a request of you, my dear, good little Dolly."

"What is that? You know I would do anything in the wide world for you."

"I do know; and, of all things, you will do this with a

heart and a half. I want you to take Nance home with you ; I want you to give her a fortnight of unmitigated happiness."

"With delight !" said Dorothy. "It was what I longed to ask for."

CHAPTER III.

DISAPPEARANCE.

THERE was some little difficulty in inducing Nance to go home with Dorothy. The child's face grew very pale when the idea was proposed to her. She hesitated, and was about to say in a quick, passionate voice, which was foreign to her gentle little nature, "No, Dorothy, I can't and won't leave my mother," but a glance at Cecilia made her quickly change her mind. She saw an expression on her mother's face that made her run to her, clasp her arms tightly round her neck, and say in a low murmur :

"You wish it, that is enough. I will go."

"Only for a few days, my darling," whispered back Cecilia.

She unclasped the child's arms from her neck. Unlike her usual fashion, she said no loving words, but began to put together the clothes Nance would require for her short visit.

Half an hour afterward Dorothy and Nance went away, and Cecilia returned to her deserted sitting room.

"Now," she said to herself, "I have got one thing to do—one thing which must be accomplished quickly. I must leave these lodgings to-night."

She rang her bell, and asked the servant who answered the summons to beg the landlady to come to her.

"Mrs. Morton," said Cecilia, when the good woman appeared, "I want to leave these rooms to-night. I shall pay for them and keep my things in them for a week or two longer, but it is probable that I shall move altogether by and by."

"I am sorry to hear it, Mrs. Digby. We all know that you are not one of the common herd, ma'am—you has your differences ; but, my husband and I, we like you, and we are sorry to part."

"Thank you, Mrs. Morton. You have always been very kind and attentive. I am going out now, to look for other rooms."

"Indeed, ma'am !"

"I don't mind telling you quite simply why I do this."

"Yes, Mrs. Digby."

"You know," continued Cecilia, "that I have been greatly blessed in helping sick people to get well again. I hold in my possession a certain secret which is very beneficial in a particular class of illness."

"Well now," interrupted the landlady, "I won't deny that reports of the sort you mention have reached me. Some folks say it's a prayer of faith you uses, Mrs. Digby; others, again, that it's the knife; but whatever it is, the recoveries is almost akin to miracles. No doubt there is a great deal of talk on the matter, ma'am, and in consequence I have had some difficulty in letting my drawing rooms; but 'Never mind,' I says to Morton when he speaks to me, 'Mrs. Digby is like an angel, and stay she shall if she wants to.'"

"I am deeply grieved to have to go. I shall not be in a hurry about removing my furniture, but I can see that I must make a change. Mrs. Morton, I can tell you nothing, nothing whatever, of what I do to help people to get well, but I am glad to make you one confidence which I trust you will respect. It is this—I mean to go on curing people."

"Yes, ma'am; it is but to look in your face to know that."

"I am leaving here," continued Cecilia, "because certain members, perhaps I ought to say a certain member, of the medical profession—— You know, of course, that my husband was a doctor?"

"Yes, ma'am. Who hasn't heard of Dr. Digby?"

"My husband was one of the noblest men in the profession," continued Digby's widow, with a touching pathos which brought tears to the landlady's eyes, "but there are some doctors who don't in the least resemble him, and one of them is jealous of my cure. He wants to discover my address. That cannot be difficult, for I have always refused to be called by any name but that conferred on me by my dear, noble husband. This doctor will follow me here, for he has already got a clew, so I must go away immediately. I must go to-night."

"Indeed, ma'am."

"Mrs. Morton, if people come to make inquiries about me, you will promise to be very careful to give them no information whatever?"

"You may rely on me, ma'am."

"Thank you, That will do."

The landlady left the room; Cecilia put on her bonnet and cloak and went out.

She was absent about half an hour. She came back then,

and went up to her own bedroom, and packed some of her clothes in a small portmanteau. This task did not occupy her more than five or six minutes. Then, taking the key out of her pocket, she opened the door of that mysterious room, the inside of which no one but herself had seen for many a day. She was an hour and a half in this room, packing busily.

At the end of that time, she asked Mrs. Morton to send for a cab. When the cabman came, he was entrusted with several large packages. These almost filled the interior of the cab, but Cecilia managed to squeeze herself in beside them, the door was shut, and the lumbering vehicle rolled away. Mrs. Digby left her lodgings in Bloomsbury exactly two hours after Dorothy and Nance had gone away.

Late that evening some one called at the Bloomsbury lodgings to inquire for Cecilia.

"Is Mrs. Digby in?" asked a voice.

"I don't think so," replied the slavey, who opened the door.

"She lives here, does she not?"

"You mean the Medicine Lady, sir? Oh, yes, but I don't think she's in to-night. I'll go and inquire of my missis."

Mrs. Morton made her appearance in the hall. The person who had come to inquire for Mrs. Digby asked many questions, but the landlady was most discreet. She was only prepared to admit two facts: one, that Mrs. Digby was not in the house; another, that she would not return to-night. Round and round these simple statements the stranger who stood on the door step metaphorically walked. He asked heaps of side questions, but from no one direction could he induce Mrs. Morton to shed any further light on the simple sayings that Mrs. Digby did live in that house, but that she was not in at present, and the landlady could not tell when she would be back.

There was nothing further to be gained, and the stranger went away.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WHITE ANGEL.

MRS. LANCASTER was just as famous as of old for her dinner parties. She liked to have rather ponderous, rather long, rather heavy meals. She liked to invite a good number of guests, with no regard whatever to mutual affinities. She was as devoid of tact as she had ever been, and her visitors were sent down to dinner, the young mated with the old, the dull

with the clever, the extremely evangelical with those whose tendencies veered toward atheism.

Mrs. Lancaster absolutely ignored the fact that to make a dinner party a success she must consult tastes and inclinations ; she must so couple her guests that they might enjoy not only the excellent fare that she placed before them, but that feast of soul which is far more difficult to obtain.

Still, the ponderous dinners were duly attended, the invitations accepted, and the good meals eaten, and Mrs. Lancaster was spoken of as an excellent creature, who wore remarkably well, much better, indeed, than her daughter Millie, who had grown thin, angular, and discontented looking ; than Helen, who had not become old in the ordinary sense, but whose face plainly proclaimed to a censorious world that she had obtained a good deal in life, but had, somehow, altogether missed the best.

Chatty, who had married a country gentleman, came up to town with her husband to attend a special dinner party. The Phillipses were there, as a matter of course. The Crichtons were also invited, and Nance, for whom even Mrs. Lancaster had a *penchant*, was present.

Dorothy had done everything in her power to make Nance happy during her visit. The child looked grave the first day—there were certain associations in the old house which affected her more than most people would have believed possible—but the bravery of heart which was one of her strongest characteristics, and which she had inherited in a marked degree from her father, soon came to her aid.

After saying to herself about half a dozen times, "It is very wrong of me to feel lonely and unhappy," she managed not only to subdue her feelings but to conquer them. Her mother wished her to stay with Dorothy ; she loved Dorothy, and would try to be a very bright and happy little girl, and collect a large fund of material for future stories to cheer her mother with.

So Nance looked quite gay to-night as she stepped out of the Crichtons' carriage and entered the big, dreary house in Harford Square. Her little face and figure were in marked contrast to all the other guests invited. She was the only child in the room. It was quite an innovation to have a child at a dinner party, and the numerous visitors were pleased when they saw the graceful little creature enter the large drawing room.

Dorothy had taken extreme pains with Nance's dress. She was in the softest white. Her clouds of lovely hair fell round her face and rippled over her shoulders.

Her father's name was not yet forgotten by his friends, and when people whispered to each other, "That pretty, graceful child is little Nance Digby—poor Dr. Digby's little daughter," more than one of the company present came up to speak to Nance, and to kiss her, and give her a welcome for her father's sake. She replied to all the remarks made to her in her quiet, dignified, half shy way. She was not a child to open her heart to strangers, however, and she very soon skipped away from the group of which she was the center to take George Lancaster's big hand between both her own, and to say to him, in a confidential aside :

"May I sit by you at dinner, Cousin George?"

"To be sure you may, pussy," he replied. "I don't know, of course, what arrangements my mother has made, but if you hold my coat tails as we go down to dinner, I will squeeze in a little chair for you somehow at my end of the table."

Several guests had been invited to this dinner, and when Nance found herself occupying a corner between George Lancaster and a very stout, good-natured gentleman, she looked up the long table in pleased wonder. This seemed to Nance something like a public dinner, and she thought the occasion most interesting. She treasured up all she saw and heard as rich material for many future romances. She looked at the gentleman at her left hand side, and came to the conclusion that he would do to occupy a central position in one of her stories. He was not like Dr. Phillips, he was not like Crichton, he was not like any doctor Nance had ever seen, and yet, at the same time, he was quite different from the old man in the shabby frock coat and heavy gold watch chain who had figured so often, so very often, in her glowing tales.

"I'll put him in," she said under her breath. "He'll be quite a nice change for mother. I wonder if he'd mind my studying him a little bit. He seems to like his fish very much, and I never care for any. I wonder if I might look at him while he is eating it."

Nance's bright eyes, shining steadily out of her grave face, were now fixed on the stout gentleman. He ate two mouthfuls of fish, then succumbed to their magnetic battery.

"I'll be quite ready in a minute, my dear," he said, turning his head toward Nance and favoring her with a quick, com-

ical glance. "You have a great deal to say to me, haven't you?"

"No," she replied, in a gentle voice. "It was your face I wanted to study. I like best making up the speeches myself."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the old man, under his breath. "Is that sweet, intelligent looking child a lunatic?"

The idea disturbed him. The salmon he was eating was quite to his taste, but he did not finish it. He sent his plate away, and refused the *entrée*.

Then he turned to Nance.

"It would be very impolite," he said, "to accuse you of too much youth. I am sure you are a very old little girl. I presume from your last remark, however, that you are an artist."

"Because I said I wanted to study your face?" asked Nance. "I am sure you are really very kind, so I don't mind telling you. I want to put you into a story."

"Good gracious, what a terrible little girl you are! You are a wolf in sheep's clothing. You don't look the character a bit, you know. No one would suppose, to look at you, that you meant to take all my foibles and pull them to pieces."

Nance knit her brows.

"I don't know what foibles are," she said. "But perhaps they are a sort of merchandise. I do so hope you are a merchant, for you look exactly like one, and that's what I'm making you up to be."

The stout gentleman laughed, but not unkindly.

"I am sorry to disappoint you, my dear," he said. "I am not a merchant, I am a doctor. My name is Dickinson."

Nance sank back in her chair.

"I'm awfully disappointed," she said, after a pause. "I did not think you looked like one of *them*. It is so difficult to get away from them; they seem to meet you at every turn."

"But really, my dear, really it is a most honorable profession."

"I know. It's most noble; but, all the same, I am disappointed. You'd have done so beautifully, and now you are no use at all."

"But why? Can't you put a doctor into your book?"

"It isn't a book, it's a story to tell aloud to mother."

"And why may not mother listen to a story about a doctor? He's a very nice sort of fellow, I should say. Most suitable for a story. You can do so much with him—use him

up in all sorts of fashions : have a sick child and get him to cure her ; have a railway accident and get him to mend the broken bones. I declare I'm becoming quite inventive myself in your company, little girl. Don't you think you can make a large use of me even though I am a doctor ? What ! you shake your head ? ”

“ It can't be done,” said Nance. “ I can never tell mother stories about doctors, she can't bear to hear them. You'd have done nicely if you had been a merchant.”

Dr. Dickinson helped himself to a portion of the next dish that was handed to him, then he turned to Nance.

“ I am sorry I can't get myself changed for you,” he said ; “ but although I cannot be quite as useful to you as I hoped, there is no reason why we should not be friends. I have a kind of idea that I have seen a face like yours before. Do you mind telling me your name ? ”

“ I am called Nance Digby.”

“ Digby ? Digby ? Bless my soul ! Are you poor Laurence Digby's little daughter ? ”

“ Yes,” said Nance.

“ Bless me ! who'd have thought it ? I had not an idea he left a child of your age. This is interesting, very. This quite accounts for the marked originality of those small utterances, and the expression in those eyes,” continued Dickinson, under his breath ; “ the child has got Digby's eyes. Upon my word, I'm quite glad I'm sitting near her—a nice child, very.”

Aloud, he said, “ Do you mind my shaking hands with you, little Nance Digby ? We needn't make a fuss, you know, or disarrange the table. Just put your small paw into mine for a minute. Upon my word, I am glad to make the acquaintance of your father's daughter. You have something to live up to, little girl. That father of yours was a good man. When all is said and done, no one can give his fellow-creature a heartier tribute than is comprised in the words, ‘ a good man.’ I am right glad I have met you, Miss Nancy, even though I am no use for the story.”

The lady at Dr. Dickinson's other side thought him an unmitigated bear, for he scarcely spoke to her, devoting all his attention to the shy, grave little neighbor at his right.

Nance went upstairs with the other ladies in a state of rapture. She had enjoyed her dinner immensely, she said. Had the time been long to her ? No, it had been short, very short.

She only hoped Dr. Dickinson would come up to the drawing room and allow her to talk to him once more.

Several of the ladies present noticed the little girl. Nance thought the atmosphere of Mrs. Lancaster's dull old house quite bright and genial, she skipped from one to another of the guests, her usually shy tongue was loosened. She had always a way of saying quaint things, and she said them still, but her manner was joyous and animated, her eyes very bright.

The combination of both mother and father in her face made it a particularly attractive one, and there was no one present on that evening who did not say a cordial word to the child, or who did not regard her with interest on account of her father.

If Nance had one qualification more than another in her somewhat composite little nature, it was a marked aptitude for business. The business of her life at present was to make up stories to comfort her mother. She had gained some material for those romances during the dinner hour—not all she had hoped, of course, but still a good deal. It occurred to her now that she might find some picture-books on a certain table that would further aid her vivid imagination. Millie Lancaster had developed of late years a taste for a certain class of periodical literature. She bought half a dozen periodicals monthly, and Nance knew from old experience where to find them. She slipped away to the far end of the inner drawing room, and, gathering a pile of *Good Words*, *Little Folks*, and other journals round her, became absorbed in the interesting task of skimming the cream from their contents.

It was also her nature to throw her whole heart into what she was doing. There were some interesting pictures of animals in different positions, wearing different costumes, and altogether conducting themselves as unlike nature as possible, which especially riveted her attention. It was roused at last to a recollection of the present by hearing her own name spoken. She looked up hastily. Two men were standing with their backs to her. She recognized them both. One was Dr. Dickinson, the other Phillips. They had evidently not seen her, for she had hidden herself away in a shadowy corner. They were talking gravely together, and about her. She felt horrified at being in the position of a listener, but a certain timidity kept her from moving. To get out of her corner, she must have told the two men who were standing in

her path that she had overheard some of their words. She wondered if it would be right for her to hold her fingers to her ears. Then a fresh remark was made that made her forget prudence and everything else in a pained, astonished curiosity.

"There is not a doubt of it," said Phillips. "I have it on the best possible authority. Mrs. Digby is using her husband's discovery extensively."

"They are talking about the cure," whispered Nance, under her breath. She clasped her hands, the color fled from her face. She remembered another occasion when she had acted the part of a terrified little eavesdropper.

"Shall I tell them I am here?" she said half aloud. "No, no! I won't! I can't! Shall I stop my ears? No, I must listen."

Dr. Dickinson shrugged his shoulders. He made some remark that Nance lost. Phillips resumed again:

"You must take my word for it, Dr. Dickinson. Digby made some valuable discoveries, from a scientific standpoint, with regard to tubercular disease. For some inscrutable reason he allowed his ideas to lie fallow. As far as I can tell he never employed them on human subject. It may have been his intention to perfect them by and by. He left most valuable papers. Mrs. Digby has a district of poor people somewhere near Gray's Inn Fields. A servant from her district has lately come into my house. She has spoken to my wife and told her of the wonderful lady—the 'Medicine Lady' they call her—who effects cures in cases of consumption which the doctors can never attempt. The whole thing is plain to me—Mrs. Digby is making a dangerous use of her husband's papers. She has herself absolutely vanished from society, and she even refuses to give her present address to her friends."

"But, as I told you just now, I saw her little daughter at dinner—she sat next me. A particularly bright, charming child."

"Exactly. You know the Crichtons? Mrs. Crichton is about the only person of our acquaintance who knows where to find Mrs. Digby. She went to see her about a week ago, and brought the child back with her. The child is a stanch little soul, and will reveal nothing. There is no doubt whatever that Mrs. Digby is pursuing a most dangerous course."

"It could be stopped, of course," said Dr. Dickinson, "but my private opinion is that this is a case of great cry and little

wool. Digby was known to be a specialist. He and I have had many a long and interesting talk over tuberculosis and its thousand and one cruel guises. I know he was a foremost man in every respect, an accurate thinker, fond of research ; but, as far as I could gather from the long conversations we had together, his principal idea with regard to phthisis was that high latitudes and a dry, bracing air were more beneficial than the time-honored plan of sending patients to relaxing and hot climates."

"He went farther than that," said Phillips. "He went much farther ; I know it for a positive fact."

Dickinson fixed his eyes for a moment with a keen glance on Phillips's face. Nance did not dare to move a finger.

"You have some reason for speaking as you do," he said.

Phillips hesitated for a moment.

"I can assure you," he said after a brief pause, during which Nance felt quite sure that the doctors must have heard her heart beating, "I speak with authority. Digby made a discovery to which he alluded to me in moments of great confidence. You know, of course, we were next-door neighbors. It was my privilege at one time, before his remarkable abilities were known, to render him assistance of a really valuable nature. I do not care to go into that. All I did was repaid by the delight I felt in the man's success. But he himself never ceased to consider that he owed me a debt of gratitude. That, doubtless, was the reason for his giving me his confidence, which he did to a large extent."

"And that?" said Dickinson, in a tone of strong interest.

"Pardon me ; I am not at liberty to repeat his words, even to you. Suffice it to say that he made a distinct discovery with regard to the cure of consumption, which would electrify the world if it were known."

"You astonish and pain me," said Dickinson. "The Digby I knew was the last man in the world to keep such a discovery to himself."

"He had very strong feelings on that point. I am scarcely at liberty to enter into them, but I think I am justified in saying that his strongest hope for the future was that he and I might work the discovery together."

Dr. Dickinson favored Phillips with a quick, sharp glance. He had his own reasons for believing that Phillips was, at least, exaggerating the truth.

"Digby and that man would never have made common

cause together," he murmured under his breath. Aloud, he said, "Then Digby's death makes his discovery useless."

"That is by no means the case. No man that I have ever met made more accurate and copious notes than Laurence Digby. Could I obtain those notes, and could I also receive the aid of a scientific man—such as yourself, for instance—I have no doubt that we could bring the thing to perfection."

"Does Mrs. Digby refuse to show you her husband's notes?"

"She does, absolutely. I have failed to get her to see a trace of reason in my arguments. I have literally showered kindnesses on that woman, and she has met me with scorn. She is poor, and I have even gone the length of offering her a large sum of money for a sight of those papers. In vain."

"She must be a fine creature," muttered Dickinson under his breath.

Nance buried her face in the sofa pillows, so afraid was she of uttering an exclamation.

Aloud, Dickinson said, "Mrs. Digby has, doubtless, her own strong reasons for what she is doing, and no one can interfere with her."

"Then you approve of her practicing the thing herself?"

"I? Good heavens, no! A woman to make use of an incomplete discovery of that kind! The thing is too mad even for contemplation."

"This mad thing, however," pursued Phillips, "takes place many times in a week in a certain district in Bloomsbury."

"You must be dreaming."

"I am not. I state what I know. Mrs. Digby has vanished from society, and lost herself to her friends. She refuses to give her address to anyone except Mrs. Crichton, who, by the bye, is largely under her influence. She practices her husband's discovery in Bloomsbury on consumptive patients."

"This is a very serious thing, Phillips. If false, it is a gross libel on Mrs. Digby. Are you sure that you can substantiate it?"

"I can. I should not attempt to say what I do without absolute knowledge. We have a servant in our house who comes from the part of Bloomsbury visited by Mrs. Digby. She goes there at all hours, day and night, is spoken of by the name of the Medicine Lady, and is in much greater re-

quest than the doctors. Our servant's brother was supposed to be dying of consumption, and Mrs. Digby did something which simply put him on his feet again. There are other cases where she has not been so successful; one, in especial, of a young man who died in great agony. He had a tendency to tuberculosis—only a tendency, mind you. He was his mother's sole support. Mrs. Digby saw him, tried the medicine, about whose power she knew so little, and the young man was dead in a few weeks."

"Your servant told you all this?"

"Not only my servant. Several of my poor patients come from Bloomsbury, and they all speak of the Medicine Lady and her strange cures. There is a sort of reserve about what they say which gives their statements all the more force. They seem unable or unwilling to give particulars of what is done, and they all speak of an oath of secrecy which each victim must take before he or she is put under the spell. Oh, it is too disgusting to think of Digby's wife stooping to it!"

"Disgusting!" retorted Dr. Dickinson. "It is worse. If half you say is true, the woman might be indicted for manslaughter."

Someone called Dr. Phillips's name, and the two men went away.

Nance was free to come out of her corner. She rubbed her dazed eyes, and softly, on tiptoe, crept across the room to an open door.

A good many fresh visitors had arrived for an evening entertainment which was to follow the dull dinner party. The stairs and landings were thronged with guests coming and going.

No one noticed little Nance Digby as she went downstairs, through their midst, in her white dress, her hair floating back from her shoulders, her cheeks as white as her dress. She reached the hall; the house door was open, there was all the confusion of many arrivals—no one thought anything about the child as she went down the outer steps into the street.

A hansom driver, who was just turning away after receiving his fare, saw the little girl and bent toward her.

"I want you to take me to Bloomsbury," said Nance. "Have you a quick horse? Can you go very fast?"

"Yes, missy. Jump in. I'll be no time in taking you round."

The man thought it odd that his little fare should have no

wrap round her shoulders nor covering for her head, but he was far too philosophical to trouble himself about eccentricities. He received the address which Nance shouted to him through the little door in the top of the hansom with taciturnity, and proceeded to urge his horse to speed.

In about a quarter of an hour from the time that Nance left Harford Square she was put down at the lodging house where her mother used to live.

"I hope your fare is not more than half a crown," she called to the man, "for that is all I have in my purse."

The fare was a shilling, but the man was content to accept the larger coin. He said "Good-night" to the little girl in a cordial voice, and urged his horse to great speed in order to get back once more to Harford Square.

All the time she was driving back to her mother, Nance kept her terrified and indignant feelings to herself. Until half an hour ago, she had always felt a real affection for Phillips; she had been much delighted with Dr. Dickinson during dinner; but during the time when she had crouched on the sofa and listened to their conversation, the two men assumed the shape of monsters in her eyes.

A great deal of what they said was beyond her comprehension, but she had heard quite enough to fill her affectionate little soul with an agony of terror and indignation. From first to last they spoke against her mother. Nance never could fathom what went on in Cecilia's heart. Many things were done which puzzled and pained the child, but nothing had ever yet happened to shake her loyalty.

Her father was the noblest of men, and her mother was the noblest of women. Her father had discovered a marvelous cure for making sick people well; and now that her father was dead, her mother was going on with the cure.

These were the simple facts of the case. It was necessary to keep the thing a secret, for there were some wicked, envious people in the world who would try to take the cure from her mother, to use it themselves; but that anyone could speak of Cecilia as her little girl had just heard her spoken of, was too horrible to dwell upon.

Mrs. Digby was in danger. Her cure might be taken from her, something awful might be done to her. Those cruel men used terrible words. What did they mean by saying that her mother might be indicted for manslaughter? What was "to indict"? What was "manslaughter"? To slaughter

meant to kill ; but her mother did not kill people, she saved them from death.

Nance must not lose a moment in warning her of the danger which was so near. Thoughts something like these whirled through her brain as she drove in the hansom to her mother's lodgings.

She stood on the door step now and pulled the bell, her little heart in a tumult of passionate excitement and fear.

"It's me, Mary Jane," she said to the astonished slavey. "Is my mother in?"

"Why, no, Miss Nance, of course not. Lor', miss, you do look elegant. My eyes, what a dress! Come right in, Miss Nance; missis will be right pleased to see you."

"I can't waste the time, Mary Jane. I want my mother. Where is she?"

"Don't you know, Miss Nance? Mrs. Digby has been gone for over a week."

"Gone? Mother gone away from this house? You must have made a mistake."

"Indeed, then, I hasn't, miss, and I aint likely to. The worrits I has had to put up with, answering the front door knocker, and the scores of people coming and asking for your good mother, and me telling them that she warnt in and warnt likely to be, and they a-telling me back that I was lying to them. It aint likely I should make a mistake on *that* score, whatever else I fails in. You look white, missy, will you take a chair?"

"No, thank you. If my mother is really not here, I'll go away."

"Wouldn't you like to know where she has gone to? Mrs. Morton will maybe tell you, although she denies that she knows anything to most other folks. Shall I run and ask her, miss?"

"No, it doesn't matter. I don't think Mrs. Morton can know, for *I* don't, and I have no time to waste asking her questions. Perhaps mother is in her district, and I know some of the houses. Good-night, Mary Jane."

Nance walked gravely down the street. It was late at night, and she looked not unlike a fair little spirit in her soft, white draperies and cloudy hair.

Mary Jane stood on the step to watch her.

"My sakes!" she said under her breath, "to think of missy coming and going like that! and never a bit of hat on, nor a

wrop, nor nothing. Maybe I ought to have called a hansom for her, but where would I find one round these parts?"

While Mary Jane stood hesitating, a sharp voice called her name from within. She was a much overworked slavey, and in attending to her duties she forgot Nance.

The little girl continued to walk down the street, too much absorbed in her own thoughts to notice the astonished looks of the passers-by.

It was very late now, and some half tipsy young men were reeling home. They stopped suddenly to bestow a rude compliment on the child.

She gave them an uncomprehending, half frightened glance. One of them was about to lay his hand on her arm, when a ragged boy, with a gentleman's heart, rushed forward eagerly, pushed the tipsy young man aside, and turning to Nance said :

"Can I do nothink for yer, missy? Never yer mind 'em, they has took more than they ought."

The boy's dirty face wore a frank expression; kindness shone out of his eyes. He was a little knight-errant in spite of his rags, and a quick instinct told Nance that he was to be relied upon, and that he was absolutely at her service.

"I am looking for my mother," she said, in a confidential tone. "She has a district near here, and she helps to make sick people well."

"Holy Moses!" said the boy. "Yer don't mean the Medicine Lady?"

"Yes, my mother is sometimes called the Medicine Lady. Do you know her?"

"Know her? *Rather*. Did yer never 'ear 'er speak of Churchyard Billy? That's yer 'umble servant. That were the name I went by in these parts afore she took me in tow. Most folks call her the Medicine Lady, but I speaks of her as the ministering hangel."

"I think you must have a very nice mind, boy," said Nance with a gentle, sad little smile.

"I don't know nothink 'bout that. Is there anything I can do for yer, missy? Ef I may make so bold as to say the word, you aint the right sort to be round 'ere by yerself at this hour."

"I know that," replied Nance, still speaking very sadly. "I have always been taken lots of care of, first by father and mother together, then by mother after father went to heaven ;

but you must know, boy, that there are times when a girl who is worth anything forgets all about herself."

"I b'lieve yer," said the boy; "yer's the right sort, or I'm much mistook. But yer must be goin' somewhere, missy, and the folks round 'ere is rough, and yer 'as no 'at on. Shall I take yer to hany place?"

"I want to find mother, very much. Do you think you could take me to her?"

The boy reflected, and scratched his head with one hand.

"The lady's often in Palmer's Buildings at this hour," he said. "'Spose we goes there fust? May I take yer 'and, missy?"

Nance held out her slim little fingers at once. The ragged boy clasped them. He thought he had never felt anything so soft as that little hand before. A queer feeling came over him—he felt humble and glad. While he was holding Nance's white hand, the possibility of getting to heaven some day came over him. He said to himself:

"There must be a corner for me up there some'ow, or a little white angel like this wouldn't give me 'er 'and."

Presently they reached a poor part. The houses were close together, leaning toward one another at the tops; the street was squalid. It was nearly midnight now, but in this place high life was still going on. Men, women, and children were swarming about the streets. Churchyard Billy very soon had a crowd following him.

"Never yer mind," he whispered to Nance, "they'll none of 'em touch yer while yer's along o' me."

He was mistaken, however. Two loud-voiced women came up, and, putting their arms akimbo, stopped the way of the boy and child.

"Yer let us pass," said Churchyard Billy.

They laughed, and one of them put out her rough hand to catch Nance's hair.

"Yer let us pass," said Billy again. "This little gel is the child of the Medicine Lady. There!"

The words acted as magic. The women fell away, one of them murmured a blessing on Nance's head. The two children hurried forward. Presently they reached a very tall house, in better style than its neighbors.

"Yere are the Buildings," said Billy. "The Medicine Lady 'as a sick gel as she's curing at the top of the 'ouse. The gel's a sort of cousin of mine—'er name is Patty Jones. They

used to call 'er Cough-away-Patty when they called me Churchyard Billy, but she'll get all right soon, I guess, for the Medicine Lady's doing a power for 'er. You come along up, missy, there aint a one in this house as 'ud touch the 'air on yer 'ead."

"I am not a bit afraid," said Nance in a stout voice.

She walked up the stairs, step after step, with her guide. They presently reached a roughly painted door, on which No. 39 was painted in glaring white characters. A jet of gas was burning outside the door. Billy turned the handle. It resisted his efforts. Then he took his whole wiry little body and banged himself against it. Still there was an impenetrable silence. After a moment's hesitation, he knelt down, and, putting his lips to the keyhole, began to shout :

"Patty, are yer in?"

"Yes," answered a voice very high, thin, and squeaky.

"It's me—Billy. I've brought a little gel to see yer, a— a white angel. Open the door, Patty, it's all right."

There was a little pause, as if the owner of the room was not quite sure how to act. Then shuffling steps came across the floor. Two bolts were withdrawn, and Nance found herself face to face with a worn, very ugly woman, between thirty and forty.

"I thought you said your cousin was a little girl?" she said, looking at Billy.

"I said she was a gel, miss, and so she is, for she aint married. Patty, yer see this little angel? She's the child of the Medicine Lady, and she's come yere looking for 'er mother."

"The lady's gone nearly two hours back," replied Patty. "Oh, my eye!" she continued, fixing her broad gaze on the child, "wouldn't I like to kiss that little dear!"

Nance felt a shiver beginning at her forehead and going straight down to her toes, but she held herself upright, and looked bravely into the face of Cough-away-Patty.

"I will give you a kiss," she said, "if it will really do you any good. Once I sent three kisses in a rose to a poor man who was dying, and father said that he took the kisses into heaven with him. If you die, Patty, will you take my kiss into heaven with you?"

"Oh, lawks!" said the woman, "do 'ear to the sweet lamb. My heyes! what chance is there of me goin' to heaven. I aint the right sort—I'm bad through and through. It's the black pit of hell that waits for me, pretty little miss."

"Father used to say," continued Nance, "that bad people could be made good, and then the Golden Gates are opened and they go inside. Couldn't something be done to make you good, woman?"

"Maybe yer kiss 'ud do it," said the woman suddenly. "No, don't you come in yere. This room aint fit for the likes of you. Yer mother knows as I aint fit to die, and so she's doin' her best to make me live. Maybe I shall live, but I don't feel like it some'ow to-night."

"It won't matter, you know, whether you live or die, if you go to heaven," said Nance.

"No, no ; but I'll never get there. I aint the sort."

"If you pray to God, he will make you good," said Nance. "Please stoop down, and I'll kiss you on your forehead. Good-by. I must not stay, for I have got to find mother at once."

The woman stooped down and received the child's kiss, with a queer solemnity struggling all over her face.

"God bless yer, missy," she said with sudden, fierce emphasis.

Billy stayed behind for a moment to ask her one or two questions, then he ran after Nance.

"The lady's gone 'ome for the night," he said, "and we none of us knows where she lives. Where was yer staying, missy, afore yer was coming down that street where I met yer?"

"I was staying with Mrs. Crichton at No. 48 Hartrick Street," said Nance.

"My buttons ! In the West Hend ! Why, yer is a swell."

Nance made no reply. Tears were brimming into her eyes; she put up her hand to wipe them away.

"I don't know what to do, Churchyard Billy," she said. "It is most important that I should see mother. I cannot tell you the reason, for, although you are an awfully nice boy, it isn't right to betray secrets, but it is most important that I should tell her something. Is there no possible way for us to find her?"

"None that I can think on, missy. She'll be yere in the morning, and the moment she comes I'll be on the lookout for 'er, and I'll give 'er any message yer likes to leave. Yer'd best let me take yer 'ome, missy. Hartrick Street is a long way from yere."

"Very well," said Nance, in a tired voice.

"Ef yer didn't mind, I'd carry yer," said the boy, "or would yer like me to fetch a cab for yer?"

"No, I had only half a crown in the world, and I gave it to the cabman who brought me to Charles Street. You are very kind, Billy, but I'll walk as far as I can. If I do get too tired, I'll stand and rest a little. Please take my hand again—I think you are an awfully nice boy."

It was between two and three in the morning when Churchyard Billy brought Nance back to Hartrick Street.

CHAPTER V.

COUGH-AWAY-PATTY.

THE miraculous cure which the doctors knew nothing about, was being tried on Cough-away-Patty. She had taken the necessary oath of secrecy; she had undergone the needful operation, not once, but two or three times. She was full of hope, of anticipation. Of course, what had cured so many of her neighbors would restore her to health.

Each morning she said to herself: "I'll be better before night; the fever will slacken, I'll not cough so much; the waste and the weariness, and the horrible thirst and the aches from head to foot will go. The wonderful thing cured little Churchyard Billy, and, of course, it will cure me."

Poor Cough-away-Patty! Not one of Cecilia's patients had larger faith than she. Life meant a great deal to her, although her existence was a very miserable and bad one. She did not want the cold grave and the dark, dark hereafter. She knew that she led an openly wicked life here, and she fully expected to be punished for it by and by. It seemed to her that she had made a sort of bargain with God. She was to sin all she could in this world, and she was to eat the fruit of her sin in the next.

This seemed to her fair enough. She did not dream of grumbling at what she considered the inevitable.

There was one point, however, on which she thought she had cause to complain. She was thirty-six now, and the doctors had told her she was unlikely to live another year.

This seemed to her to be scarcely fair. If she could live to sixty, and then die, she felt that she could not utter a complaint. But to die at thirty-six, and to be punished through

all eternity for thirty-six short years of sinful pleasure, seemed wrong, somehow, to her dull and untutored mind.

The Medicine Lady came, and gave Cough-away-Patty hope. After all, she might live to be sixty.

The tired-out woman lay on her straw bed during the entire night after Nance's visit and coughed, coughed until morning. It was awful to listen to that cough. There was a lonely woman in the next room who stuffed her ears with cotton-wool on account of it. A man in the room underneath got up and went out because he could not stand it. There was a hollowness about it, a relentlessness, which reminded one of death at his cruelest.

Toward morning it got a little better, but by that time also the woman's handkerchief was slightly tinged with blood.

At a very early hour the Medicine Lady was seen hurrying up the stairs. The condition of the patient the night before had not satisfied Cecilia. She had scarcely slept during the night on account of her, and with the dawn she hurried back to Palmer's Buildings.

Success makes the most timid brave, and Cecilia, who had never belonged to the timid order of the race, who was always reckless and headstrong, who had all that in her nature which might have made her a fit leader in many a forlorn hope, had grown full of courage of late with regard to her husband's discovery.

Her courage was false, her deeds wrong, but her own belief in Digby's cure was absolute. Her husband had discovered an absolute remedy for the fell scourge of consumption. His remedy had cured her, it had restored Dorothy Sharpe to perfect health, and in her district she could lay her finger on many people, both old and young, who were once more strong and vigorous because of the remedy which she employed.

Alas! success made her bold—too bold. At first, Cecilia had used the attenuated lymph with extreme caution. She had inoculated her patients with very small doses of the fluid. She had been very careful to use it only on those persons whose illness was not in an advanced stage.

To all appearance these persons largely benefited from her skill. Their coughs disappeared, they put on flesh, they grew well.

But by slow degrees the natural thing followed. The Medicine Lady was besieged by those who were in a more advanced stage of the complaint. With these patients her suc-

cess was in every case only partial, and in more than one the complaint seemed to be rapidly augmented by the introduction of the lymph.

Cecilia wondered if, in such cases, she ought to use stronger doses. Here her ignorance of medicine became a serious stumbling-block ; she felt, to a certain extent, foiled, and her anxieties became intense.

In the case of Patty Jones she had been very unwilling to use the lymph at all, but Patty had begged and implored, had gone on her knees, and groveled at the Medicine Lady's feet.

"I want sixty years to take my fill in," she exclaimed. "I can't do without my sixty years. If you don't give it to me I'll curse yer ; I'll give yer sech a curse as 'ull wither you up. There's somethink savage inside o' me, and I won't die at thirty-six. I won't die ef there's any living soul as can keep me alive. Ef you don't use the cure on me, I'll curse yer with sech a curse that maybe you'll drop down dead."

Cecilia struggled against her better judgment for a day or two. On the third day she yielded. Patty took the oath of secrecy, and the process began.

Mrs. Digby had a pass-key to let herself into Patty's room. The woman was asleep when she entered. She went softly up to her side, put her hand on the brow, which was wet with perspiration, gently felt the fluttering pulse in the skeleton wrist, sighed heavily, and turned away.

The sun had risen, and some of his rays were coming into the wretched room. Cecilia arranged a shawl in such a fashion that the sleeper's face remained in shadow. Then, going to the window, she opened it an inch or two, so that the sweet, fresh air of the morning might fill the room.

Putting on a pair of gloves, she skillfully made a fire and lit it, and put a little kettle on to boil.

When Patty awoke, an hour later, Mrs. Digby brought her a cup of tea.

The sick woman opened her intensely bright eyes and gazed at Cecilia as if she did not quite recognize her ; then she laughed harshly.

"You aint done it yet," she said. "I coughed all night orfe, and there's blood on my handkercher. You has got to try it agen. Has yer brought the stuff along wid yer ? You has got to puncture it into my arm once agen. Maybe yer didn't go deep enough last time. Maybe that's why I aint any better. Do yer think so—eh ?"

"Drink your tea first, Patty. Then I'll speak to you," said Mrs Digby.

The poor creature raised herself slightly and drained the cup to the dregs.

"That's good," she said. "I was orfle dry. Now then, yer 'ad better fire away. Ha' yer got the stuff?"

"No, Patty, I have not brought it with me."

"Curse yer! yer'd better go back for it, then. Yer know as well as I know that minits is precious, and that I aint a bit nor a scrap better. You don't do it strong enough. You ought to put a good pinch of it into me. You go back for it now, as hard as yer can, or I'll let a curse fly out at yer."

"You must not curse me, Patty; it is not right. I have done my utmost for you."

"Well, well, I won't ef you'll be quick. You fly home at once for the stuff, and I'll have my arm all bare and ready when you come back."

"Patty, you know I was unwilling to try the remedy on you."

"You needn't tell me that. It was the fear of the curse that made you do it at all."

"You are wrong to say that. I did it because I pitied you from my soul; because, to give you a few more years of your wretched life, I would part with several years of my own."

"My life aint wretched—not when I'm strong and hearty. I stole a lot of stuff once from a draper's shop when his back was turned. It wer' blue meriner, a lovely color, and I made it into a gown. It suited me fine, *I* can tell yer. I went on the top of a 'bus down to Kew in that gown, and I wore a bonnet all over yallow buttercups. Gentleman Joseph was with me—we was sweethearting at that time. He went to sea arterward, and was drowned in a gale off the Lizard. But, Lor', I remember that day when we went to Kew as if it was yesterday. It was prime, I tell yer, and that gown giv' me a sight of pleasure, though I did steal it."

"I can't be sorry that you had a happy day, Patty, although it was wrong of you to steal the stuff for the gown."

"Yer needn't tell me that. I has got to make up for it, arter I has had my sixty years. I has made it all square atween the Almighty and me. We understands one another. I has my fill for sixty years, and then he does his pleasure on me. Now, why don't yer go and fetch the stuff?"

"I am not going."

"Not going? Wot do yer mean?"

"No, I am not going; it would be no use to inject any more of the medicine into your arm. It would only make you worse."

"Wot?" The woman uttered a piercing cry.

Cecilia suddenly knelt by her side. She put her arms round her.

"You poor soul!" she said. "You poor, stricken, desolate soul! I would help you—I would if I could. Oh, believe me!"

There was something in Cecilia's tone, such a pure note of absolute sympathy, that the angry burst was arrested on the woman's lips. Her face grew deadly pale, the perspiration stood out on it in great beads. She tried with her feeble hands to push Mrs. Digby away. Then, as suddenly, she attempted to draw her nearer.

"You 'mind me of someone! You has a look in your eyes, a look—now I know. A white angel came here last night, and she kissed me right yere, in the center of my forehead, right on this spot. She had lips like a rose, and her face were like a bit of heaven, and she said I'd go there if I'd turn good. I aint going, of course, 'taint likely; but you 'mind me of her, and I can't curse you. There, let me be."

The woman turned her head away, dropped her hands to her side, and one tear after another trickled down her cheeks. Her breast heaved up and down, and her breath came very quickly.

A man's step was heard ascending the stairs. There came a loud, imperative knock at the door.

Cecilia went to open it. She found herself face to face with two men—James Phillips and Dr. Crichton.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WORTH OF A KISS.

CECILIA'S first feeling was one of alarm, mixed with annoyance. One glance, however, into Crichton's face caused the annoyance to vanish. Alarm, great alarm, was now her only sensation.

"Phillips and I are glad to have found you, Mrs. Digby," said Crichton, in a grave voice. "The fact is, we must ask you to return with us immediately to Hartrick Street. Nance is seriously ill."

Cecilia put her hand for a second to her heart; just for a moment, while the sword was piercing her, she felt faint and sick; then she stood upright, brave endurance on her face and in her attitude.

The dying woman from her bed in the corner of the room watched the three figures in the doorway.

"What is it?" she called in her sharp voice. "Are you going to take the Medicine Lady away? She can't go; she's my doctor and I want her."

"I must go," said Cecilia, returning at once to the woman's bedside. "I will come back to you presently, but I must go now."

"Then you leave me alone to die? You will fail me altogether?"

"No, I won't; I will come back to you. Don't keep me now. If Billy is anywhere around he will come in and help to take care of you."

"Billy is on the landing," said Mr. Crichton, "if you mean a lad who calls himself Churchyard Billy; it was he who brought us here. He is waiting outside."

"Tell him to come in," said Cecilia.

The boy entered the room. She gave him a few hurried directions, tied on her cloak, fastened her bonnet strings with trembling fingers, and walked downstairs with the two men.

A cab was waiting at the door. The three got into it, and Crichton told the driver to take them to 48 Hartrick Street.

"At last," said Cecilia, "I am ready to hear what is wrong. Nance was quite well when I saw her a few days ago. What is the nature of her illness?"

"It is a queer story," said Crichton. "She may be better when we return, but she cried so piteously and so constantly for you that Phillips and I felt that we could not leave a stone unturned to find you. Luckily, the boy knew where you were very likely to be heard of. But for him we should probably not have had a chance of discovering your whereabouts."

Cecilia beat one of her hands restlessly on her knee.

"You puzzle me very much," she said. "How did you come across the boy who is called Churchyard Billy?"

"That is it," said Crichton. "That is the story. Nance went with us to dine at the Lancasters' last night. She was

all right during dinner time, but when Dorothy and I were preparing to leave, she could not be found anywhere. We went home in a state of terrible anxiety. Nance had not returned to Hartrick Street. Between two and three in the morning, this boy, Churchyard Billy, brought her home. The moment she got inside the house she fainted. When she recovered consciousness she became very feverish. All night long her constant cry has been for you."

"Did she say anything of what happened to her from the time you missed her at the Lancasters'?"

"She only said that she wanted to find you—that there was something that she wished very much to tell you. She would say nothing more."

"I came in to see Nance this morning," said Phillips. "Her temperature was very high. She has evidently taken a severe chill, and has, besides, sustained some sort of shock. I don't like her condition at all. It was absolutely necessary to find you without a moment's delay. Perhaps when you come to Hartrick Street you will see that your primary duty is to your child."

"That always has been my primary duty," replied Cecilia in a voice of ice. She gave Phillips a defiant look. His eyes flashed back another at her.

No further words were uttered until the three arrived at their destination.

Dorothy was waiting in the hall. She took Cecilia's hand, put her arm around her neck, gave her a quick, sympathetic kiss, and then took her upstairs to the old, pretty nursery, which had always been reserved for little Nance. It looked as sweet and bright as ever. The same furniture still adorned it. The same pictures hung on the walls. The same white cot, beautifully draped, stood in one corner. When Cecilia entered the room, she felt as if the sorrows of the two last years were nothing but an ugly nightmare. A quick thought flashed through her brain. "Have I been dreaming all this horrible time? Is Laurence still alive?"

The thought and the hope vanished as soon as they found utterance. Nance was lying on the white bed, fast asleep, her cheeks burnt with fever, her little hands were very hot. She moaned now and then in her sleep. She had all the appearance of a child who was going to be very ill.

Cecilia took off her gray cloak and bonnet. She turned to Dorothy and began to speak in a quiet voice.

"I will sit by her until she awakes," she said. "Don't let anyone come into the room. It will seem quite natural to her to see me sitting by her bedside when she opens her eyes."

"Very well," replied Dorothy. "Cecilia, dear, it was absolutely necessary, or I would not have sent for you."

"You did right to send for me, Dorothy. Don't let us talk any more now. I will come to you if I want anything."

Mrs. Crichton went out of the room, closing the door softly behind her. Cecilia drew an armchair forward, and sat down by the child's bedside. The little sleeper murmured some names in her uneasy slumbers.

"Mother," she said several times, "I must find mother. I am not frightened, boy; I have got to find my mother. I don't much like kissing that poor woman, but if—if it does her any good—father would like me to be brave, he said so. Once I kissed a rose."

The child flung herself round restlessly to the other side of her bed. The next moment she had opened her eyes, and fixed them, with surprise, recognition, and delight, on her mother.

"Mother, you have come at last!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, my darling," replied Cecilia; "I came as soon as ever I heard you wanted me. Now I am going to wrap you in a shawl, and you shall sit in my arms and put your head here on my shoulder."

Nance smiled faintly. "My head feels quite confused," she said, "and I am awfully hot, and my legs ache; but I don't mind anything now you have come."

"No, my dearest, now I have come you have nothing to fear. Mother won't leave you again. I did wrong to send you from me."

Cecilia took the child into her arms. Nance lay still for a few moments, enjoying the comfort of being close to her mother again.

"I feel better," she said. "I'll be all right now that you are here. Mother, may I tell you about last night?"

"Yes, my darling, I want to hear about it; but you must tell me quietly, you must not excite yourself."

"I will try to be quiet, but it was so awful! They were both talking—Dr. Phillips and Dr. Dickinson."

"Dickinson—Dr. Dickinson?" asked Cecilia, with a start.

"Yes. Why do you look so funny, mother? I sat near

Dr. Dickinson at dinner. He was a nice man. I hoped he was a merchant, for I wanted to use him for one of my stories ; but, of course, he turned out to be a doctor. It seems to me that almost all men are doctors. But he was very nice—at least, I thought so until I found him out.”

“ You found him out, my darling ? Now, Nance, you are getting too excited.”

“ I must tell you, mother. I was on the sofa in the back drawing room in Harford Square, and I had got a lot of Cousin Millie’s magazines round me. I was looking at the pictures, and Dr. Phillips and Dr. Dickinson came and talked ; they were close to me, and I heard them. They talked all about you, mother. Dr. Phillips told Dr. Dickinson a lot of wicked things about you. He said you were curing people with some medicine of father’s, and he said you had no right to use it. He got very angry, and he said it was wicked, and Dr. Dickinson said it was wicked, too. He said that it must be stopped, and he said that you could be ‘ indited ’—that’s the word, mother, ‘ indited ’ ; I haven’t a notion what it means—‘ indited for slaughtering people.’ Wasn’t it awful to say such things, when you save such a lot of lives ? Oh, mother, mother, it broke my heart ! It broke my heart, mother ! ”

Poor little Nance began to cry feebly. Cecilia soothed and petted her as only a most loving mother can soothe an overexcited child. She crushed every feeling of alarm with regard to herself in her earnest endeavor to soothe the little girl.

She told Nance that she had been brave and good to go and look for her. She had done just what a brave and noble child should have done : and that no harm had befallen her, because God had taken care of her all the time. She also told Nance that her fears with regard to herself were unfounded, that no one could do her the least harm, and that, for the present, she intended to stay with her little daughter day and night.

Nance felt quite happy after this talk. She asked her mother to put her back to bed, and began to chatter in her old, bright, fanciful way.

Cecilia listened to the child’s pretty ideas for some time, then she went out and spoke to Dorothy.

“ I am not at all satisfied about Nance,” she said. “ She has had a very serious shock. The fact is, she heard Dr. Phillips and Dr. Dickinson talking about me. The child is

over sensitive in every way, and they spoke in a manner that would naturally much alarm her. You know, Dorothy, yes, you know, how delicate she is. I should like Dr. Arbuthnot to come and see her—this evening, if possible.”

“We will send for him,” said Dorothy. “Is he the man you would best like to see her, Cecilia?”

“It is very probable that I should have preferred Dr. Dickinson, whom my husband thought so highly of, but in the child’s present condition he might agitate her. Dr. Arbuthnot can give as good an opinion as anyone. As to the treatment——” Cecilia paused, and a bright gleam came into her eyes.

“O Cecilia!” said Dorothy. “It isn’t consumption that you dread?”

“Yes, Dorothy, the child inherits a tendency to consumption. Her father always feared it for her. She may quite recover from her present attack, or serious consequences may arise. I have seen so much illness lately, dear Dorothy, and I have studied this form of disease so extensively, that I cannot be mistaken. Nance is seriously unwell.”

“You would not try your cure on her; you would not dare to!” said Dorothy in a subdued whisper.

“I cannot say. Don’t ask me. Oh, that God would guide me!”

“Does He guide you, Cecilia? Do you feel His guidance when you go down to those poor people and try your cure on them?”

“Don’t ask me, Dorothy,” said Cecilia again. Her face was the color of death. She went back to the sick child’s room.

About seven o’clock that evening a little twisted note was brought up to Mrs. Digby by a servant. It was a dirty note, smeared with ink, written on the worst paper, the sentences scarcely legible.

Cecilia opened the note and read the brief contents.

“ONERED LADY: This is to say that my cousin, poor Patty Jones, died at three o’clock this arternoon.

“Your faithful BILLY.”

“Is the messenger downstairs?” asked Mrs. Digby.

“No, ma’am,” replied the servant. “The boy handed in the note and ran away.”

Cecilia put it into her pocket ; Nance's bright eyes were fixed on her mother's face.

"Is anything the matter, mother darling?" she asked.

"No, my little love, there is nothing exactly the matter ; there is one poor soul less in this world, and one poor suffering body at peace."

"Mother," said Nance, "I kissed a poor woman last night. She asked me to. She didn't look nice, and I didn't want to kiss her. It was very wicked of me not to wish to, wasn't it, mother? Then I remembered something, and I—I kissed her on the forehead. I felt quite glad afterward. Do you know anything of the woman, mother? She spoke of you, so of course you must know her. She had a very odd name. Cough-away-Patty they called her. Oh, mother, she lived in such a dreadful room!"

"She doesn't live there any longer ; Nance, my darling, the woman you kissed has died. This little note was to tell me of her death."

"I am glad I gave her that kiss," said Nance. She did not add any more ; she lay with her sweet little fair face turned toward the sunset.

Nance's beautiful old nursery faced west ; there happened to be a very exquisite sunset that evening. Some of its reflections filled the room now, and the child's eyes grew bright and full of peace as she looked up toward the sky.

"I am awfully glad I kissed the poor woman," she said once or twice.

Dr. Arbuthnot came between seven and eight. He made a very careful examination of the child. Then he went downstairs to speak to her mother.

"You must be very careful of her," he said. "The disease which exists in her frame has not yet taken an active form, but it is certain to do so sooner or later."

"You are quite convinced that she is consumptive, Dr. Arbuthnot?"

"Quite convinced, my dear madam ; need you ask? The child has all the peculiarities which accompany the disease. That and her family history make the fact all too patent. Her nervous system, too, is in a very critical condition. She is overexcited, she is morbid, she is a great deal too sensitive. What I fear most for her is mischief to the brain. Keep her very quiet. Be as stupid as you can in her presence. I doubt if you are the best person to be with her."

"I shall never leave her alone again, Dr. Arbuthnot. The person who rests and satisfies her little heart must be the right one to stay with her day and night."

"Yes, that is so. Well, keep her quiet ; she must not get up for a day or two. I will write a prescription for a simple tonic for her, and come and see her again at the end of the week."

The doctor hurried away, and Cecilia went back to Nance's nursery.

CHAPTER VII.

THE VOICES IN THE CHILD'S ROOM.

NANCE slept peacefully, but her mother did not go to bed. A whirl of many thoughts swept through her brain. She sat in a low chair close to the sleeping child. Now and then she pressed her hand to her own forehead, now and then she moved restlessly about the room, but her eyes never closed, nor did she for a moment relax the intensity of her watch.

About midnight Nance stirred, opened her eyes for a moment, spoke her mother's name in a voice of sleepy satisfaction, then turned on her pillow, and went off once more into the land of dreams. When the child did this Cecilia stretched out her hand and laid it softly, very softly on the white brow. The child's forehead was slightly damp. Mrs. Digby bent lower, and listened to the hurried breathing. It was short—not exactly labored, but too quick for perfect health. That, the moisture on the brow, and a peculiar expression on the little face confirmed all too plainly Dr. Arbuthnot's words.

"I will do it," said Mrs. Digby. "The fell disease with which my only child has been threatened from her birth has at last really commenced. It is in a very early stage—still it has undoubtedly commenced. I must use the lymph without further delay. I have very little fear. Fear ! I have no fear. In a case like Nance's the cure is absolutely certain. When have I ever failed to cure when I used my husband's lymph in the early stage of consumption ? My little darling shall be saved. I can live without everything else, without Laurence—yes, it is an empty world, but I can live without Laurence ; I can also live without friends—I can live through evil repute, through dark reports, but I cannot live without Nance.

I must save her ! I will save her ! I can fancy Dr. Arbuthnot's astonishment when he sees the change in her ; I can see the wondering looks that will be cast at me. I know that Dr. Phillips will consider his suspicions confirmed, but I don't hesitate. I will introduce the lymph as soon as possible into the child's system. I will save her, cost it what it may !”

Having made up her mind, Mrs. Digby grew, as she always did in such cases of emergency, intensely calm and quiet. She rose very gently from her chair by the sleeping child, and going across the room, put on her bonnet and cloak. She then noiselessly unfastened the door, and went out. She hesitated for a minute whether to leave the sick child alone or to summon Price, Mrs. Crichton's maid, to sit with her until her return ; but, after a brief deliberation with herself, she decided that it would be safest to leave little Nance alone for the couple of hours during which she must be away.

It was between twelve and one when Cecilia glided down the stairs of her husband's old house. She knew every trick of the stairs ; she knew that on those stone stairs her footsteps would not make the slightest sound. She reached the hall door, and, dexterously removing the chains, opened it. She carried a bunch of keys in her pocket, and on this bunch was the old latchkey which used to open the door in the past days. She remembered this now with satisfaction, and, putting the door on the latch, closed it softly behind her, and went down the steps into the street.

She walked a little distance, looking for a hansom which might be out late. People were returning from different festivities, but the street was already quieting down into that stillness which pervades such localities for a few hours before dawn. Cecilia never noticed that a man, who had been standing in one of the deep porticoes, stepped out into the street when she passed by, and followed her at a respectful distance. Whenever she stopped—and she stopped once or twice, looking up and down some street that she was crossing—the man retired into the shadow, and so hid himself from her view.

Cecilia walked for a long distance, looking now and then for a hansom. At last she gave up expecting to find one, and hurrying her own footsteps went down several streets, the man following her at a distance of about twenty yards. Had she not been so preoccupied, she must have noticed the foot-fall which kept such time with her own that it might almost have been considered an echo ; but Cecilia's thoughts were

all within, and she observed nothing external. She reached a poor part of the town, and, walking down many by-streets, stopped at last at a humble door.

She knocked, and a woman with a pale, careworn face obeyed her summons at once.

"There have been several people asking me when you'd come in, lady," she said.

"Thank you, Mrs. Martin," said Cecilia. "Please tell anyone that happens to call that I am engaged on pressing business from home for the next few days. Please do not fasten the hall door, I am only going upstairs for a moment or two. I have to leave again immediately."

"The child upstairs is much better, ma'am. You will be glad to hear that."

"I am very glad. In a case like your daughter's there is little to be apprehended in using my remedy."

"Her cough seems almost gone, ma'am. It's quite wonderful. I was on my knees for half an hour to-night thanking the good Lord for his mercies."

A queer kind of twitch came over Cecilia's face. She stopped for a moment as if she meant to ask the woman to do something for her, then, changing her mind, she ran upstairs.

In about a quarter of an hour she left the house and returned, as fast as her feet would carry her, to Hartrick Street. There was no echo of her footsteps this time. The man who had followed her had traced her to her destination, and was now satisfied to return to his own home.

Cecilia reached No. 48, let herself in with her latchkey, and returned to Nance's room, to find the child sleeping as calmly as she had left her.

No one had missed Cecilia out of the house. No one would guess that she had left it during the midnight hours. She had put all the chains and bars back upon the hall door, and her absence could not even be suspected.

The short summer night had nearly given place to dawn when Cecilia returned to the old nursery. Nance was sound asleep—she looked as if she had not stirred since her mother left her two or three hours ago. The faint hectic flush which had been so observable the night before had given place to pallor. Her beautiful hair lay in masses over the pillow, the dark lashes rested heavily on the white cheeks. Her slumber was so gentle, her breathing so faint, that she scarcely seemed to breathe. The look on her face was full of peace—a dead

child could not have presented a more unearthly appearance.

Cecilia felt her heart give a great bang in her breast, then it bounded forward with fierce rapidity. A sickening fear possessed her. She bent over the little sleeper in anguish. For a brief moment she really thought the child was dead.

The faint breathing, however, soon reassured her. She sat down in the armchair by the bed, and wiped the perspiration from her own forehead.

She had received an awful shock. That one moment's pain seemed suddenly to have added years to her life. She had made a mistake, however. Thank God, she had made a mistake! The little life was still there. It burned feebly, doubtless very feebly, but she had that with her which would soon fan it into flame.

Each moment the daylight grew brighter in the room. Cecilia only waited for a little more light to inject the first dose of the lymph. She attempted to do it while the child slept. The pain was so trivial that it might not even wake her. For every reason she thought it best that Nance should not know anything about the remedy until health was restored to her.

The sun arose, and some of its brightness was reflected through the closed blinds. The room faced west, but the sunshine lay everywhere on this glorious summer morning.

Cecilia's heart kept on giving great irregular thumps. Nance slept with the serenity of a baby. On other occasions Mrs. Digby had always found courage and calmness come with indomitable resolve. The resolve was there, stronger than it had ever been, but queer—queer, the courage was wanting. Cecilia wondered at herself. It seemed to her that all her past life had been but a training for this supreme moment—the moment when a mother might snatch her child from the jaws of cruel death. Not a doctor in London would do the deed, she knew. No passionate entreaties on her part, no eloquence, however intense, would prevail on them to use her husband's remedy to save his child's life. The worst of them would sneer, the best of them would put the remedy away with gentle words of pity, and tell the distracted mother that twenty years hence this immature discovery might be perfected and some other child's life saved.

This child would die. She would die because her mother

was a coward ; because, in the supreme moment, all her courage had failed her.

"This is folly," said Mrs. Digby to herself. "Each instant is of value. There is plenty of light now. I must do the deed at once, or the child will awake."

She went over to one of the windows and made certain preparations. Her hand shook horribly. She felt that she could curse herself for her cowardice and want of nerve. What *was* the matter ? Where was her usual coolness ? In every other case she had felt, at a moment like this, that she was a woman of iron. At such a time her hand was steady, her touch firm. Now, the tremor which shook her life to its very foundations rendered her almost powerless.

She went into a small dressing room which adjoined the nursery, and bathed her face and hands in cold water. She filled a glass brimful of the liquid and drank it off. She was better now. She went quickly back to the nursery, and approached the child's bed.

She determined to think of Nance as of some other woman's child. She fought hard to get back the feeling of ecstasy which at moments like this had more than once supported her. She had felt raised above the common earth. She had the sensations in her breast that might animate an angel sent down from heaven to save a suffering world.

Now, alas, alas ! all was different. She was surrounded by despondency, gloom, by an ever increasing sensation of terror, of fear—a sort of awful foretaste of failure.

"What is the matter with me ?" she said to herself. "I will go over and kneel by the window, and look up at the sky, and pray to God. God *must* bless this deed. It must be right for a mother to save her child. The remedy is absolutely certain to effect a cure. It never failed yet in a case like the present."

Cecilia went to the window and knelt there, but no thought from her tempest-tossed heart would pierce the blue vault. On the contrary, old scenes and old images thronged before her puzzled brain. She was back again in the little farmhouse at Hampton Wick. The sun was rising on another summer's morning, and a dying man was watching its rays as they crept across the room. Some words, as distinct as when they were spoken, sounded again in Mrs. Digby's ears :

"I charge you, Cecilia, I charge you——"

She sprang to her feet as if a serpent had stung her. Her

husband had given her a sacred charge, and she had made a sacred promise.

The room seemed suddenly to become full of voices, all taunting her with the fact that she had broken her promise and been false to her charge.

The voices confused and nearly maddened her. They sounded loudest near the window. She must get away from them. She went back again to the child's bedside ; she knelt down by the sleeping child. Of course her husband was angry and God was displeased ; it was the worst madness of all to hope for a blessing on her work—still, whether with a blessing or without, she must save the child. If God would not help her, perhaps the devil would. Some power which she could never resist had impelled her to go on in the past ; perhaps it would still come to her aid.

Ah, now she felt better ! Much, much calmer—quite like her old self.

She put her hand under the bedclothes, and softly felt for the child's arm. She drew it gently outside the coverlet, and pulled up the nightdress sleeve. The little arm lay there, white as marble, the blue veins showing through the skin. It lay there, warm and soft—a living thing—a beautiful part of a beautiful child. Often had its pressure been felt round Cecilia's neck ; many, many times she had rested her tired head against it. So frail it looked, and yet so strong it was—strong with the protection of a child's holy love.

Cecilia bent down and kissed the bare, smooth arm.

She felt afraid that the little sleeper would awake, but she did not.

CHAPTER VIII.

JUDGED.

CECILIA, having now tried her husband's discovery on several patients, was prepared for certain symptoms. In cases where the remedy was successful, they came with marked regularity. The first injection of the lymph was followed in a couple of hours by shivering fits and a marked rise of temperature. This feverish condition lasted for the greater part of the day, during which the patient felt all his symptoms worse than before the remedy was applied. After twenty-four hours the fever abated, and an improved condition began to set in. After the lapse of a few days Mrs. Digby again injected the fluid. This

time the feverish symptoms were slighter and of shorter duration. The improvement which followed was also proportionately greater.

This was the invariable course when the remedy was likely to prove a success, and Cecilia confidently expected such an event in the case of her child.

She was startled, therefore, and rendered uneasy by the fact that Nance did not exhibit any shivering or rise of temperature. All during the day which followed the injection of the lymph she remained quiet and languid, talking very little and sleeping a good deal. She was not in the least feverish, and the expression of her sweet face was happy.

Crichton came in to see the little girl in the evening, and was pleased with her appearance. He spoke a few words to her mother on the landing outside the room.

"I am only a surgeon," he said, "but I know enough of medicine to be thoroughly satisfied with Nance. Her whole nervous system received a shock the night she went to look for you. She was very much excited during yesterday, and the languor of to-day is nothing but the reaction."

Cecilia did not say a word.

"I am thoroughly satisfied, I repeat," said Crichton. Then he gave Mrs. Digby a quick look. "I am sorry that you do not share my sentiments," he said, in a sympathetic tone.

"I do not," she replied. "I cannot explain my fears, but they are strong and heavy. I am going back to the child now."

Crichton entered the drawing-room, where his wife was sitting.

"Mrs. Digby is very nervous about Nance," he said, "and the child is really doing as well as possible. She has not the slightest rise of temperature, in fact she looks well, only weak. She will be all right in a day or two, I have not the least doubt."

"I think," said Dorothy, "that Cecilia expected——"

"What, my dear?"

"Nothing, nothing!"

Mrs. Crichton turned her head away, her face was crimson. Her slight figure shook with agitation.

"Dorothy, you are concealing something from me," said Crichton. "What is it?"

"Nothing, Frank."

"You are absolutely stooping to tell me an untruth. Your manner declares that there is something. How white

you have turned now, and you are trembling ! Look at me, Dorothy. Oh, good God !” continued Crichton, suddenly turning white to the lips himself. “You don’t mean to say that that woman—Dorothy, rumors have reached me—Phillips has been talking. Very queer rumors are afloat about Mrs. Digby. Is it possible ? But it can’t be. Is it possible that she has used her quack nostrums on her child ?”

Dorothy suddenly sank down in the nearest chair ; her trembling became excessive.

“What if she has ?” she murmured.

“What if she has ! What a truly dangerous woman ! Heaven alone knows the mischief she may have done. Good heavens, Dorothy, are you mad ? But my fears must be groundless. No woman in her senses would be so wicked. If I thought so I would turn her from the house this minute.”

“You are cruel !” said Dorothy, springing suddenly to her feet. “No woman in the world is less wicked than Cecilia Digby. You, of all men, are the last who should speak against her. But for her—but for her—— O Frank, Frank, I took a vow, but I’ll break it to clear her in your eyes. Cecilia possesses a cure for consumption. She used it in my case. She saved the life the doctors could do nothing for !”

Crichton was about to speak when there came an interruption. Dorothy was clinging to him, his arms were round her, when Mrs. Digby walked swiftly into the drawing room. The moment she saw her friend, Dorothy sprang forward.

“I have broken my vow, Cecilia,” she said. “I have told my husband of the cure——” Then she fell back, all further words arrested.

There was a look on Mrs. Digby’s face which froze the hearts of the husband and wife ; that look took something out of their lives which could never be replaced.

It was to them both as if they had suddenly got a glimpse into hell itself.

Cecilia went straight up to Crichton, and put her hand on his arm.

“It does not matter now in the least what you have heard,” she said. “The medicine that cured Dorothy will kill Nance. It is my just—my most just punishment !”

“Cecilia, what is wrong ?” asked Dorothy.

“Nance has had a very strange and alarming seizure. At

the present moment she is unconscious. Will you"—Mrs. Digby turned to Crichton—"will you fetch Dr. Arbuthnot and Dr. Dickinson here as soon as possible?"

"Do you want them both?" asked Crichton.

"Yes, I want them both. Ask them to come and consult over Laurence Digby's child, and hear his wife's confession."

"I will go," said Crichton. "I will go directly. Don't keep me, Dorothy." She rushed down the drawing room after him.

"Say a kind word to her before you go," she said, clutching her husband's arm. "Look at her! Say one kind word!"

"I cannot," he replied.

He shook his wife away almost roughly, and left the room.

"Come upstairs, Dorothy," said Cecilia. Her tone had not a trace of emotion in it.

Dorothy followed her to the nursery where the sick child lay.

There was a strange and marked change in her—a change so manifest and so great that Dorothy could not help giving vent to a cry of anguish.

Cecilia sat down by the bedside.

"Why don't you speak, Cecil?" said Mrs. Crichton.

"Speak?" she said, raising her eyes once and flashing a glance at Dorothy which caused her to shiver. "Look there! What words have I to say?"

The child lay partly curled up; her head was thrown back; her complexion was deadly pale, with the exception of one cheek, which was deeply flushed.

Dorothy crouched down at the foot of the bed. Cecilia sat motionless in the chair which she had occupied during the greater part of the day. A wooden cuckoo clock, bought long ago for Nance by her father, ticked over the mantelpiece. The hour struck, and the cuckoo came out and proclaimed by his clear note that spring and summer are eternal.

The sunshine stole in bars across the room. Some dogs barked in the street below. Some carriages rolled by.

One rattled up presently and stopped at the door.

There was the sound of commotion in the hall, and men's steps coming up the stairs. The nursery door was opened, and Crichton, accompanied by the two physicians, came in.

Dr. Arbuthnot uttered one brief, shocked exclamation when he looked at the child. Dr. Dickinson said under his breath:

"I should not know my little friend of two days ago."

Cecilia was asked several questions; the necessary examination was made. The strange and sudden seizure which had rendered Nance unconscious was fully described.

Dr. Dickinson pressed his finger rather heavily on the child's wrist. A dull red mark was instantly produced, which did not quickly fade.

The two physicians looked at one another, and murmured something about the "*tache cerebrale*."

Soon afterward they left the room together.

"I will take you down to my consulting room," said Crichton.

Before they could reply, Mrs. Digby came out of the nursery and joined them.

"I wish to be with you when you are having your consultation," she said. "I have something of importance to say which will throw light upon the case."

"Pardon me, this is quite unusual," began Dr. Arbuthnot.

But Dr. Dickinson looked into her face and said quietly:

"Let her come."

The three men and the woman went downstairs. Cecilia had not been in her husband's consulting room since that dreadful night when she had emptied his secretary of its contents. She remembered this fact now, but was too absorbed by other things to be affected by it. The moment the doctors closed the door, she said;

"I wish to be told the absolute truth. What is the matter with the child?"

"Her illness is clearly defined," began Dr. Arbuthnot.

"Name it."

The one physician looked at the other. They stepped aside, and whispered a word or two. Then Dr. Dickinson came up to Mrs. Digby and spoke to her.

"Your little girl is suffering from an acute affection of the brain. The name of the disease which has stricken her is known in medical phraseology as tubercular meningitis."

"Tubercular!" repeated Mrs. Digby. She pressed both her hands against her heart. "Such a disease would affect

consumptive patients," she murmured. "It is a form of consumption, is it not? consumption of the brain?"

Dr. Arbuthnot interrupted.

"Yes," he said. "I saw the child last night, and gave a poor opinion of her. I told you, Mrs. Digby, that she was consumptive. Each symptom pointed to this conclusion. I also feared mischief to the brain, but this sudden and complete collapse I was not prepared for."

Mrs. Digby began to tremble very much.

"Is—is such a rapid change for the worse unusual?" she asked.

"It is practically unknown; I have never had a similar experience."

"I think I can explain it."

"You? My dear madam, scarcely likely! The case is of deep interest. I must take several notes. It points to——"

Dr. Arbuthnot was interrupted. Dr. Dickinson came up suddenly and took his arm.

"Mrs. Digby wishes to say something," he said. "Listen to her."

"Won't you sit down?" said Crichton, springing forward and offering her a chair. Her deathly pallor frightened him.

"I won't sit," she said. "I am arraigned before a tribunal. You three men are my judges. You can do as you think fit with me."

Dr. Arbuthnot moved impatiently. He thought Mrs. Digby had taken leave of her senses, but there was something in her eyes which arrested Dr. Dickinson's marked attention. He remembered his conversation with Phillips two nights ago.

"I wish to say," continued Cecilia, "that my husband on his deathbed entrusted a very valuable secret to my keeping. He had made a discovery with regard to consumption. He called it incomplete. He never used it except once, and then it was on himself. On his deathbed he told me to burn all the papers relating to this discovery, or, if I preferred it, to give them in a sealed packet to *you*, Dr. Dickinson."

"I promised faithfully."

"I broke my promise. I read the papers. I thought the discovery complete. I prepared a certain lymph by a process clearly indicated. My lungs were slightly affected after a bad attack of pneumonia. I used the remedy on myself with perfect success. Mr. Crichton, the girl who is now your wife was given a year at the most to live. You, Dr. Arbuth-

not, declared her case hopeless. I tried the remedy on her and she recovered. Lady Sharpe brought her to see you, and, after careful examination, you declared her lungs restored to perfect health. Do you remember?"

"I recall the fact," said Dr. Arbuthnot. "Merciful heavens! am I in a dream?"

He took out his handkerchief and mopped his forehead. So keen was his excitement that his eyes looked as if they were starting from his head.

"Afterward," continued Cecilia, "I tried the remedy on a great many people. I had some failures, but my success was greater than my failure.

"This morning I—I said to myself, 'The crucial hour has arrived when a mother may be privileged to save her child.' I—I experimented on the child."

"You did?" said Dr. Arbuthnot, his extreme agitation finding vent in a burst of fury. He rushed up to the pale woman and clutched her by the arm. "You experimented on that frail child—that dying child? How did you experiment?"

"I introduced some lymph into her arm."

"My God! Was there ever such madness? Lymph! Another word for poison! Dickinson, I can't go on with this. Question the woman. Ask her to describe the nature of the—of the lymph."

Dr. Arbuthnot walked to the other end of the consulting room and looked out of one of the windows. His anger and agitation were almost overmastering him.

Dr. Dickinson said a few words to Cecilia. She told him, as well as she could, something of the nature of the poison she had employed.

"You have been most culpable," he began.

"*Culpable!*" retorted Dr. Arbuthnot, returning once more to the charge. *Culpable* is no word. I shall refuse to give a certificate of death."

"You said there was a tendency," began Cecilia.

"A tendency to brain disease? There was. I deny nothing. You have made that tendency a certainty. I cannot speak to you; your conduct is——"

"Hush," said Dr. Dickinson, "this is no time for man to interfere. What are words? Look at the woman's face. God has judged her."

Cecilia walked toward the door of the consulting room. Crichton opened it and she passed out.

CHAPTER IX.

ATONEMENT.

MRS. DIGBY returned to the nursery. The blow that had been dealt to her left her outwardly composed. She did not observe the frightened, shocked, and pitying glances given to her by each member of the household who happened to look in her face.

There was a look about that stricken face which caused people to say for themselves what the doctors had already said, "God has judged her."

The rumor of what Cecilia had done spread rapidly through the household. It penetrated also to No. 47, and electrified Helen Phillips with horror.

Phillips sprang up when he heard the news, and joined Crichton in the next house.

"I have known this for some time," he said. "I have always waited for you to speak of it. Your silence has filled me with astonishment."

"Before God," said Crichton, whose face was white as ashes, "the whole thing has only burst upon me this evening. I can't speak to you about what I feel. I am torn both ways. If half of what Mrs. Digby says is true she has killed her child, but she has saved my wife's life."

"Your want of curiosity with regard to your wife's recovery is one of the puzzles I can never fathom," retorted Phillips.

"I am not a physician," replied Crichton, "and when a man like Arbuthnot pronounced her restored to health, I did not think it necessary to fathom the matter any further. I must own, however, that Dorothy was always singularly reserved on the subject of her restoration. Yes, singularly reserved. The events of this night make many things plain."

The two men were standing on the hearthrug in the consulting room. Phillips remained silent a moment; then he said in a low tone:

"The events of to-night surprise me very little. I felt quite certain that Mrs. Digby would come to catastrophe. Give her rope enough and she was sure to hang herself in the end."

"Then you absolutely knew of this—you knew what was taking place?"

"I suspected. Digby had told me of his discovery. You need not mention it, Crichton, but our idea, had his life been spared, poor fellow, was to work it together."

"That is strange," said Crichton, "for Mrs. Digby told us in this room that Digby wished Dickinson to have the papers."

This was absolutely news to Phillips, and he could not help biting his lips in dismay. After a little pause, he said :

"That may have been so, for Dickinson's love of science is well known. Nevertheless, Digby and I had many a talk over the matter, and at his death I offered to buy the medical notes from his widow. When she refused to sell them I guessed she was up to some mischief."

Somebody knocked at the consulting room door, and Crichton went to open it. When he returned, after saying a word or two to the messenger, Phillips said :

"I should like to go up to see the child, if you have no objection, Crichton. You know how much attached both my wife and I are to her."

"My dear fellow, it is not for me to object," said Crichton ; "the unhappy mother is in the room, and *she* may not like it. Her wishes must be consulted, of course."

"I think I can manage that part of the business," said Phillips, with a low laugh.

He turned to leave the room, and a few moments later tapped softly at the nursery door, which was slightly ajar.

There was no response to his knock, and he stole into the partly darkened room.

A shaded lamp was standing on a distant table, and a screen drawn round one side of the bed protected the light from the child's eyes.

She lay in precisely the same attitude as she had done two hours ago, when the great consulting physicians had visited her. Her head was thrown back, her breathing was quick, the intense pallor of one cheek and the fiery blush on the other were very perceptible. Beyond and above this appearance there was a pinched look about the small face which made it appear as though a blight had passed over it.

No one with the least experience could look for a moment at the child and entertain a hope of her recovery.

Phillips had always felt a certain tenderness of heart toward little Nance Digby. A time had been when he envied Digby and his wife the priceless treasure of a living child.

But when Digby died, his envy had vanished, although his love for the pretty, gentle, sweet child remained.

The sight of her now, therefore, stricken down by a fell and remorseless fate, filled him with a sort of horror; he forgot his own ambitions, the purpose which overmastered all his own life—he forgot everything but the mingling of anger and sorrow which tore his breast.

Mrs. Digby was standing, upright and motionless, at the head of the bed. Phillips did not see her at first—his eyes were riveted on the child; for quite a minute he did not glance at anything else.

Cecilia looked steadily at him as he looked at Nance. She glided softly up at last, and laid her cold hand on his arm.

“See my work?” she said in a low tone.

He started when she touched him, and shook her hand away with repulsion.

She did not notice this action of his, but, moving her position a little, stood also gazing at the unconscious child.

“The doctors say,” she continued after a very long pause, “that I have killed her. My only child! My priceless treasure, killed by her mother’s hand! It sounds very horrible, does it not?”

“It *is* very horrible,” said Phillips, moving a step away. “How can you bring yourself to speak of it?”

“The speaking is so little,” she replied, “it means so little compared to the feeling. Dr. Phillips, you earnestly desired to obtain possession of my husband’s discovery. Had I given it you, you would have been the guilty person instead of me; you would have killed many people instead of one. It would not have mattered in your case, for you are one of those licensed to kill. As for me——” she paused and pressed her hand to her heart. Phillips’s eyes began to flash a steely gleam of wrath. Before he could speak Mrs. Digby again touched his arm.

“Hush!” she said. “You must not say cruel words to me in the presence of the child. You have your revenge. You see with your own eyes what I have done. Now go.”

“Mrs. Digby,” said Phillips suddenly, “will you trust me even now, at the eleventh hour, with your discovery? You need a friend at a time like this. Give me the papers, tell me where I can get them, and I’ll see you through.”

“Through what?”

Before Phillips could say anything more, Mrs. Crichton and

a nurse came into the room. Cecilia returned to her old post by the head of the bed. Phillips was forced to go away.

"Crichton," he said on the stairs, "I have seen the child ; the sight of that child's changed face is a horrible one. It is a miracle to me how that woman can keep her reason. The child cannot possibly live many days."

"Arbuthnot scarcely gives her *days*," responded Crichton.

"There will be a difficulty about the certificate of death," said Phillips, in a low tone.

"I know," answered Crichton, in a whisper ; "but a coroner's inquest *must* be avoided. I will talk the matter over with you presently, Phillips. You will take Mrs. Digby's part, will you not ?"

"I cannot say. She has been most culpable. My blood boils when I think of the child."

Crichton said a word or two more, and soon afterward the two men parted for the night.

Dorothy, up in the nursery, was standing by her friend's side.

There are times in life when the person you call your friend stands in the same room with your body—your living, breathing, suffering body—and yet is a thousand miles away from the spirit which animates it.

Cecilia seemed to herself to be divided by a gulf deep as hell from all her friends to-night.

Dorothy spoke to her, and she replied. Her words were collected and quiet. There were no tears in her eyes and no emotion in her manner.

Arrangements were made for the night. Dorothy, worn out with excitement and grief, went to bed at last.

The nurse lay down in the dressing room within call, and Cecilia and the dying child were alone.

Mother and child—such a holy relationship—nothing higher on this earth, nothing closer, nothing more tender, nothing nearer the divine !

The mother knelt down and leant over the child. When she did so a faint warmth seemed to come back into her frozen soul.

All the world would be against her forever, now. She had done something which no man could ever forgive, but she knew that the child herself would understand and forgive.

"My little darling !" she murmured. "You can't hear me, for you are too near the white spirits and the white throne.

You are close to the city of God—I feel that I shall never see you again. Is that true? Shall I never see her again? If I thought it!” Cecilia sprang suddenly to her feet; her calm was broken up. It was with the utmost difficulty she could keep herself from speaking aloud, and so bringing the nurse on the scene.

“God!” she said, looking up and speaking in a sort of inward frenzy, “I will patiently submit to any punishment you like to inflict upon me for the whole of my natural life if you will let me have the child again in another world! I disobeyed my husband, I broke a promise to the dying; I did a desperate and dangerous thing, and although some lives were apparently saved, yet the life of my only child is being taken away. But I must have her back in the world beyond the grave. What can I do for you, God, great God Almighty? What can I do to appease your wrath?”

Cecilia began to pace softly up and down the room. Her footsteps were light; they made no sound. No boards creaked as she walked backward and forward. She was in a long white dressing gown, and she looked like a ghost in the uncertain light.

The nurse in the other room awoke, and, bending forward, saw Mrs. Digby pacing up and down.

She knew what had happened, and, murmuring to herself, “Poor thing! I shouldn’t wonder if she turned crazy,” resumed her interrupted sleep.

The sight was tragic, no doubt, but she was accustomed to sadness and tragedy. She could scarcely afford to quarrel with them, for they were the means by which she earned her daily bread.

Mrs. Digby continued to pace up and down. The dying child breathed quickly on the bed; from time to time she gave an unearthly, piercing shriek, called by physicians the hydrocephalic cry. When she did so the mother came up and looked at her, wetted her lips with some cordial, and gently rearranged the bedclothes. All the time thoughts kept surging through her brain.

The child would die. She knew enough of medicine, she had dipped sufficiently into medical science, she had seen too many sicken and die, to have any doubt on that point.

But could she do anything to appease the wrath of God, so that she might have the child back again for her very own in eternity?

As she pondered over this problem, and struggled to obtain a clew to guide her out of this darkness, the memory of an old Bible story came back to her.

It was the horrible story of Achan, who, in a moment of temptation, had taken of the "accursed thing." By Joshua's orders, Achan and all belonging to him had been stoned and afterward burned; but before his death the stern captain of Israel's hosts had said to him, "My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto him." Achan did so, the accursed thing was done away, and God's anger was appeased. The Lord turned himself from the fierceness of his anger.

Achan was, doubtless, punished in the flesh, but there was a gleam of hope that the moment of confession brought absolution to his stricken soul.

It flashed through Mrs. Digby's worn and excited brain now that her husband's papers were as the accursed thing to her. If she burnt them all now, as she ought to have done years ago, the angry God who was pouring his judgments upon her might be appeased.

She stood still when this thought came to her, clasping her hands tightly together. It seemed to her, when the thought occurred, as if the mocking voices that had filled the chamber of death all night were hushed. There was a stillness after a great tumult. Thousands of angry spirits were still looking at her, but they no longer spoke words of accusation.

She went over to the window, and looked up at the sky, which she knew by now must be growing pale in the dawning east. Over her worn face there flickered a faint smile.

"I'll do it, God," she cried. "It is not your will that the terrible disease of consumption should die out of the earth. I have believed in my husband's remedy, and have used it in a full belief. I did wrong to use it, and you are punishing me in the most awful way in which a woman with a heart like mine could be punished; but if I burn the papers, you will know that I repent. The accursed thing will be gone—gone forever—and you will let me have the child again when my earthly life is over. Yes, I will make atonement."

She went over to the bed, pressed her lips two or three times on the child's forehead, took one of the little hands between both her own, went down on her knees as if she were about to pray for a blessing on the flickering life, found that no prayer would arise, and got up again.

She was not many moments changing her dress ; then, in her bonnet and cloak, she went into the room where the nurse was sleeping.

"Nurse," she said, "you must get up and sit with the child."

The nurse started. She sat up on the bed, and stared at Mrs. Digby in bewilderment.

"Are you going out, madam ?" she asked in an astonished voice.

"I am ; but I shall be back again before very long. Sit by the child's bed till I return."

Then she went downstairs, and let herself out, as she had done two nights ago, into the street.

The sun was rising now, but Hartrick Street was still very quiet. Shutters were up at all the windows ; the sun was awake, but people still slept.

Cecilia walked very quickly. The sense of hush was still present with her ; it comforted and supported her. The very fact of the closed shutters, and the houses full of human beings all folded away in sleep, added to the sense of unnatural calm in which she lived and moved.

Her walk occupied her nearly an hour, but at last she reached her destination—a shabby corner house at the end of a shabby street. Cecilia noticed a thin, overgrown girl crouching down on the steps by the door. She thought she knew the girl's face, but was not sure. As she approached, the child started, peered anxiously at her, sprang to her feet, uttered a joyful sort of whoop, and disappeared round the corner.

Mrs. Digby felt a passing wonder, but her mind was too preoccupied to notice the incident for more than a minute.

She took a latchkey from out of her pocket and fitted it into the lock of the hall door. It was an understood thing between her and her landlady that the door should always be kept on the latch ; she was surprised, therefore, now, when it resisted her pressure. For a moment she hesitated, then rang the bell at the side, which tinkled feebly.

She did not expect this faint summons to be attended to, and was almost startled when, in a moment or two, the door was opened by the landlady, who was fully dressed, and had the appearance of a woman who had not gone to bed all night.

"Thank the good Lord, ma'am, you has come !" she exclaimed the moment she saw Cecilia. She drew her into the

house with almost violence, slammed the door behind her, and instantly bolted and barred it.

Mrs. Digby was in too stunned a state to notice the action. She said in a low voice, "I want to go to my sitting room, Mrs. Walters. I have something to do there; I shall not be very long."

"Dear heart!" said Mrs. Walters, "it's the good Lord that has sent you back. Before you does anything else, you must come up and see little Anne, Mrs. Digby. She was better until last night, but all night long she has been feverish and porely, and crying out for you like mad. I kep' 'er as quiet as I could, but my man wanted me to send for Dr. Hudson. I jist wouldn't, though; I waited and waited, hoping as she'd cool down, or that you'd come, for I says, 'If Mrs. Digby comes, she'll give her another dose, and then she'll be all right.'"

"I'll go and see the child," said Cecilia.

She went up the rickety stairs, entered the room where the sick child lay, ordered some simple alleviative, and came down again.

"You'll use the medicine before you go, Mrs. Digby?" whispered the mother; "it won't be a certain cure unless you use it again."

"I shall not use it again, Mrs. Walters. Your little girl's symptoms are not alarming. I can do nothing further for her. If I have helped to stave off consumption, be thankful; if not——" The words died on her lips.

There was a noise in the street—a trampling of many feet, a harsh laugh, and then the ponderous sound of a heavy knock against the hall door.

"Sakes alive!" said the woman. Her face turned white. She rushed to the nearest window and peeped out. "Why, I didn't think they'd come at this hour," she said; "there are ten or twelve of them here already—men and women, and gals and boys!—and it not yet six in the morning! They has come for you, ma'am. There's no doubt on that p'int. There's something up in Naylor Street; a child as has died of the erysipelas in Hodge's Court; and they has been back and forrards for you all yesterday evening. Back and forrards they was, till I was weary going to the door and answering them, and quieting 'em, too, for that matter, for the woman whose child died come along and said awful things. That was why I bolted and barred the door, for I thought they

boded no good coming in crowds like that, and the woman, poor soul, cryin' so bitter piercin'. How they got to know where you lived passes my belief, but—— Oh, hark to 'em now! Why, they'll bring the house down! I'd best go and quiet 'em! I'll say you're not here and not likely to be, and I'll send Bobby the back way for the police if they don't go quietly home at once."

"No, don't do anything of the kind, Mrs. Walters. Say that I am here, that I am particularly engaged for a few moments, but that if they will quietly wait I will be with them very soon."

"You'll never go out to 'em, will you? An unruly, masterful crowd like that? Why, it aint safe."

"Yes, it is safe enough. Go and say what I tell you. Don't open the door, for your own sake. Call to them from the window. Tell them to have patience, and I will soon be with them."

Cecilia turned away. She opened the door of her sitting room and went in. The sitting room was on the first floor of the house. The blinds were drawn down at the two windows, but the full daylight streamed in through many crevices.

There were more and more voices in the street, more and more footsteps. The noise kept surging and dying away like the ebb and flow of a tide.

Mrs. Digby pressed her hand for a moment to her head. She forgot that there were people waiting for her in the street. She only thought that the angry spirits were using their voices once again to lash and torment her.

A spasm of great agony crossed her face.

"Oh, merciful God!" she cried aloud, "keep the voices of those avenging spirits quiet until my task is done, or I shall lose my senses!"

She went over to the fireplace. A fire was laid in the grate; she sometimes needed one for her preparations. She put a match to it, and it soon blazed merrily. Then, approaching the incubator, she removed its contents one by one and laid them on the flames. Some little glass vials shared the same fate, and then followed the burning and destroying of the papers.

Her task occupied her, in all, not more than twenty minutes. When the last paper was burnt, the last note in her husband's clear writing reduced to gray ashes, she heaved a sigh of

relief and went to the window. Her impulse was to open it and take in a draught of air. A wonderful load was lifted from her mind, and she wanted the reviving influences of the fresh air now to act upon her body. It seemed to her as if, in some miraculous way, she had once more got into touch with her dead husband and her dying child.

She stretched out her hands to draw up the Venetian blind, which shut away both air and sunlight, when a cry, harsh and angry, sounded on her ears.

It was the piercing, quavering cry of a woman.

The coarse words uttered were these:

"Tell the Medicine Lady that ef she don't come out at once I'll go myself and drag her limb from limb."

Cecilia took one peep through the crevices of the blind, then she stepped back into the room.

She felt calm and collected now at last, for she realized her position. The narrow street was thronged with an angry, excited mob, and they wanted *her*. She was in physical danger. The knowledge instantly braced every nerve.

She had removed her bonnet and cloak when she first entered the room, and she did not put them on. She unlocked the door of her room and stood on the landing.

Mrs. Walters was there, cowed, trembling, with a face like death.

"You mustn't go out to them, ma'am," she said. "They're mad about somethink, and some of them are quite desp'rit. There's no saying what they may do ef you show yourself, ma'am. They say you have poisoned as many as you have cured; and there's that woman whose child died yesterday—the poor soul is nearly off her head. You must hide, Mrs. Digby; you mustn't show yourself. My husband has slipped out the back way for the police, and Bobby, he's barricading the front door. Oh, merciful heavens! he'll never hold it, though. Do you hear 'em? They're all forcing up agen it! They'll break it in in a minute or two."

"Let me go," said Cecilia, wrenching herself away from the woman's hands. "Do you think I know what fear is? Something happened to me last night, and I passed the stage where fear can be met. I promised to go to the people. If they want me they have a right to me."

She went downstairs, pushed the terrified Bobby aside, and, removing the chains and bars from the hall door, flung it open.

Her action was so sudden and unexpected that a woman and a child both tumbled forward into the passage. Cecilia stooped to pick up the child. It was a toddling creature of not two years old. She placed it in its mother's arms.

Then she came herself and stood on the steps of the house.

They were tall steps, and she was able to look down on the sea of upturned faces. Her own face was still and pale, her heart beat in slow and heavy throbs.

There was a sort of grand calmness about her, as though she had passed through death and knew the very worst that life could offer.

Her fearlessness, the expression of her face, had the usual effect upon the crowd. They fell back, all their angry voices hushed for the moment.

They waited for Mrs. Digby to speak. Even the woman with the shrill, quavering voice—the woman whose child was lying dead in Hodge's Court—ceased to scream for vengeance on the Medicine Lady.

"What can I do for you, you poor souls?" said Cecilia at last.

There was a thrill of such pity in her voice that it went through the hearts of some of the men and caused several women to cry.

"Do you want any more of my medicine?" continued Cecilia, when no one replied to her first words.

A horrible babel and jargon of sounds began now. Revelations came pouring out on the morning breeze; the men and the women spoke together; a baby began to cry; a boy punched a smaller boy's head.

The upshot of all the words was this: Little Ben Priestley had died from the effects of the cure. He had died in dreadful suffering, and when his mother went to look for the Medicine Lady she was nowhere to be found. Little Ben was a merry child a fortnight ago; he had a cough, of course—most of the children in Hodge's Court had coughs—and in the winter little Ben, as well as the others, had spit up blood. But he was laughing and gay a fortnight ago, and now he was dead; he had died of erysipelas, and his mother was nearly crazy.

Then there was Susy Larkins—she was worse instead of better; and Hugh Deeling, who was supposed to be quite cured a short time back—his cough had returned. What did the Medicine Lady mean? Where was the thing to end?

Was she poisoning the folks instead of curing them? Some people said she was a witch, and that the devil sent her to them instead of God. Of course, they had broken their vows, and had met together and talked the matter over, and now they had come for an explanation.

Would she come back with them, and try the cure once again on Susy Larkins and Hugh Deeling? Would she come that very moment? Would she try the cure again, and let the restoration to health of these two be a test to the people whether she were of God or of the devil?

"No, I will not come," said Mrs. Digby.

Her words were scarcely spoken before a boy sprang out of the crowd, ran up the steps, and stood by her side.

"Look yere," he said, "you sees me, all on yer. I'm Churchyard Billy. Didn't I hack jest, and didn't I spit blood? And warnt I getting ready for the worms, fast as boy could? Look at me! Why, I'm fat! There aint no waste in me, not a bit on it. I'm plump, like a fat partridge. *Do* I cough? Have I a pain in my side like a sword? You tell me that, neighbors. You all knows me, since I war a kid. Churchyard Billy I war, and Churchyard Billy I'd be now in my coffin but for her. She cured *me* and I sez, '*Bless the Medicine Lady!*' There aint never a doctor as cures all the folk, and I sez, '*Bless her!*'"

"What about Cough-away-Patty?" screamed a voice.

The boy was about to reply when Cecilia turned and looked at him. She touched him on the arm, and said gently:

"Thank you, Billy."

Then she faced the crowd.

"Listen to me," she said; "I have something to say. Do your worst afterward, but listen to me first.

"My husband, Dr. Digby—some of you remember my husband; *you* do, James Ashton; I see you in the crowd—he sat up with you the whole of one night—well, my husband, Dr. Digby, thought a great deal about you all. The thought of you lay against his heart; the thought of you made him suffer. Then he set his brains to work—he had wonderful brains, clear and strong and vigorous—and when these brains of his worked hard in your behalf, a thought was given to him. The thought grew bigger and bigger, and at last it took form in the cure which I have used on you. Dr. Digby made the medicine, but—my poor people, I have a confession to make to you—he, with his strong and tender heart, and his great brain, *was*

afraid of his own medicine. He saw you dying, as you all will go on dying, of consumption, and he feared to try his cure on you. He died in the prime of his life. Some of you know how suddenly he was called to die. On his dying bed he spoke of this medicine to me. He said to me, 'Burn the medicine! Put the papers that tell all about it into the fire!'"

Here Mrs. Digby was interrupted by some cries in the crowd. A woman shouted out "For shame!" and a man, raising his hand to claim attention to himself, remarked in a firm voice, "I got a sight of good from that medicine! I'm hale and hearty now, and I sez 'Bless the Medicine Lady!' I'grees with Churchyard Billy. I sez 'God bless her!'"

"But God did not bless me, my friends," said Cecilia. "Listen, all of you, I have more to say.

"My husband died, and I went to burn the papers. I could not burn them: perhaps he foresaw this, for he also said to me, on his deathbed, 'If you will not burn the papers, take them to a friend of mine, a good, clever doctor, and give them into his charge.' I did not do this either. I could not do it. I thought the doctor would put those precious papers into a drawer and forget them, and the people would still die.

"One day there came to me a temptation. I was ill, and a doctor told me that I was threatened with consumption. I had read my husband's papers many times, until the meaning of all his thoughts seemed burnt into my brain, and when I knew that I was so ill I determined to use the medicine on myself.

"I did. I injected it into this arm—once, twice, three times. In six weeks I was well.

"A girl, a very dear friend of mine, was dying of the same disease.

"I tried the remedy on her, and she, too, recovered. She is a happy married woman now, in perfect health.

"Then I took rooms in this place, and went among you all, and saw your sufferings, and the ravages consumption makes every day, and the thought of the medicine burnt deeper and deeper into my soul. And at last I tried it on a child here—Fanny Severn was her name—and the child got well. By slow degrees I tried it on one person and on another, and at last there came to be a silent sort of rage for it, and a great fierce belief in it, and you all loved me and blessed me, and followed my footsteps day and night.

"What have I done to change you? Why have you come

here, filling up the street and hurling angry words at me? I have cured many of you. Why have you come here to insult me, and to frighten the poor woman in whose house I lodge?"

"What about little Ben Priestley?" called out the mother in a voice of frenzy.

"Ah, yes; what about little Ben? *I did not cure little Ben.* My friends—no, I won't call you my friends—my poor, poor people, whom from my soul I pity, whom from my soul I have loved, I will say one thing first, in self-defense, and then I will tell you why you have come to curse my work among you this day. It was very wrong of me to use that medicine, but I did not do it with a wrong motive. I used that medicine in perfect faith in its power to save you. I believed in it, as I do that there is a God in heaven, and that there is a devil turning the world every day into hell. I believed in the remedy, and I used it in full belief, and in most tender pity for you all."

"That you did, lady!" said a poor girl, coming forward and bursting into tears. "I'll never forget what my cough war, and the blessing of lying down at night and never hacking once."

"But," continued Mrs. Digby, scarcely noting this fervent interruption, "I know why you have come to-day. *Because God has cursed me.* His curse is so dreadful that yours seems like nothing. He does not wish me to use the cure. He says it is too mighty for me. I have stolen it from scientific men. I am an ignorant woman, and I must not try it any more. God has taught me this lesson in the most awful way in which it could be taught to a mother.

"I have a child—one beautiful, brave, noble child. Two nights ago I used the remedy on her, and she now lies at the point of death. Mrs. Priestley, my child and your little Ben will soon meet each other in the world of spirits. The medicine has killed my own child.

"I have nothing more to say. I must go back to my dying child now. Make way for me, good people."

There was a little hush and pause in the crowd. The look on Mrs. Digby's face subdued everyone.

She was about to descend the steps and pass through the midst of the quiet and sorrowful people, when a man at the far end of the mob suddenly exclaimed:

"I b'lieves in the medicine still. It's doin' me a sight of good, and I wants a second dose."

Instantly several other voices joined this man's.

The Medicine Lady must come back again without delay to the slums and back alleys and administer some more of the cure.

"Oh, yes! Down with the doctors! Down with the men of science, who were afraid to help poor, suffering humanity! The Medicine Lady and her grand cure for ever and ever!"

After the fickle way of crowds, the people were all now blessing the lady, and declaring there was no medicine in the world like hers.

There was a pause at last in the buzz of voices, a brief respite in the violent jostling and commotion. Cecilia took advantage of this silence to speak again.

"I can never help you any more," she exclaimed. "I did wrong, and God cursed me. I could not live under his curse; his frown was more than I could bear.

"I have burned all the papers that my husband left, and destroyed the medicine. That medicine can never make any of you either better or worse again."

A howl followed this explanation.

"I will come back and talk to you about this another day," continued Mrs. Digby. "I will try and persuade a really good and clever doctor to come with me, to see and to help those of you who are ill. I myself will nurse you, too, oh, gladly! day and night; but let me pass now, for I want to be with my dying child."

"No, that we won't," suddenly shrieked a woman. "We won't let you move from here until you gives us back the medicine. We don't b'lieve that story of yourn—the beautiful medicine *aint* burnt. I don't b'lieve it for one—I don't b'lieve that ere tale. It's a cock and bull sort o' tale, and I don't swaller it; you're tellen it to cheat us. You're feared, that's wot you ere. You think the doctors 'ull be down on you. Ef it is gospel true that you put that medicine on the fire I'll curse you here as I stand, sure as my name is Jane Raglan. Why, you was *savin'* my Billy with the medicine, and now you say the beautiful cure is in the flame. Oh, curse you! *curse you! curse you!*" The angry woman's tones rose to fury. Before anyone could stop her, she stooped, picked up a stone, and sent it flying through the air. It hit Cecilia on her temple, making a slight wound.

She put up her hand to wipe away the blood.

"Oh! go into the house, do *do!*" gasped Churchyard

Billy. "She's mad, and she'll hurt yer ; but she aint as mad as the mother o' little Ben. Look at *her* ! Hark to *her* ! She means mischief. Oh, come inter the house !"

The words had scarcely left the boy's lips before a wild cry—the horrible, unmistakable shriek of the insane—rang through the air. Mrs. Priestley had come stealthily round the outer edge of the crowd. Now, with the sudden spring of a tigress, she leaped up the steps.

"Take that for p'isoning and killin' my pretty Ben," she gasped.

A knife flashed in the sunshine ; it made a wound with a sure aim ; the warm lifeblood spurted out, and Mrs. Digby, stabbed to the heart, sank on the ground.

CHAPTER X.

WHERE MANY ROADS MEET.

A DEAD child lay in the old nursery at Hartrick Street. A dead child with a sweet smile round her lips ! A sunbeam stole in through a chink in the closed window blinds, and kissed the childish mouth.

"How am I to break it to Cecilia?" sobbed Dorothy. "Why was she not there to see her child die? How will she bear this fearful news?"

"Where can Mrs. Digby be?" inquired Crichton. "The nurse says she went out between five and six this morning. She has never come back. Does anyone know where she is likely to be?"

"I have her address," said Phillips, who was standing in the room.

Dorothy raised her face, and looked at him in surprise.

"Yes," he continued, meeting her gaze steadily ; "the address came accidentally into my possession. I will go to her, if you wish, and tell her what has happened."

"I will go with you," said Dorothy.

"No, my love," interrupted her husband. "The scene will be too painful for you. Phillips and I will go together."

"Nothing can be too painful for me to do for Cecilia's sake," answered Dorothy with passion. "You all say hard and bitter things of her now, but she saved my life. I was in hell, and she brought me back to peace, to heaven, to God. You are all cruel to her, but I shall always love her best of any woman on earth."

"I have one ray of comfort to give her," said Crichton. "Arbuthnot has been here this morning. We have been going carefully into the past history of little Nance's health, and Arbuthnot is firmly convinced that all that Mrs. Digby did when she used that fatal lymph, which clearly acted as a blood-poisoner, was to hasten the end by a few weeks. The child would, in any case, have died from tubercular meningitis."

"Let us go to Cecilia," said Dorothy. "This news will lift something from her mind. Let us find her as soon as possible."

As they were driving to the lodgings, Phillips made a remark :

"There will be no coroner's inquest then, Crichton ?"

"I am thankful to say there will not," was the short reply. Crichton's dislike to Phillips, always a latent quality, began now to take active form.

After a silence of some moments, Phillips said again :

"One of our first objects must be to get hold of those valuable papers."

"That is Dickinson's affair," replied Crichton. There was something in his tone which made Phillips fall back on his seat in the carriage and not speak again.

At last they reached the lodgings. The crowd had dispersed, the street was nearly empty.

"I am afraid," said Dorothy, suddenly turning very white. "How can I break these tidings to Cecilia ?"

Crichton put his head out of the window. The street was empty, it is true, but a policeman was standing on the steps of the house. He touched his hat to Crichton, came down, and said something in a very low voice.

"Stay where you are for a moment, Dorothy," said her husband. "Phillips, there is something wrong here. Will you come in ?"

The two men entered the house. The policeman followed them. The door stood a little ajar.

Dorothy sat in the carriage, her hands locked tightly together, her heart beating wildly. What was wrong ? What had the policeman said ? Was this really the house to which Cecilia had moved ? Was she there, and was Phillips inside speaking cruel words to her ?

"I won't stand it," said Dorothy to herself. "Why do they keep me outside ? I will go in. Once she stood between me and death, now I'll stand between her and the angry,

bitter world. She is my dearest friend, my best friend, for she gave me back to life."

Dorothy sprang out of the carriage, ran up the steps, and entered the house.

Some people were standing in the hall. A queer looking, ragged boy was crying as if his heart would break.

"Does Mrs. Digby live here?" asked Dorothy.

The boy pointed with his hand to the first floor.

There were several people lining the stairs, but they made way for Mrs. Crichton as she ran past them.

She reached the first landing, and saw Phillips standing by a door which was partly open.

"Don't go in," he said, stretching out his hand to bar her entrance.

"What is the matter?" she asked. Then she looked into his face, and something in its expression froze any further words on her lips.

Crichton was standing just inside the room.

With a sudden, quick movement Dorothy rushed past Phillips and went to his side.

"Yes, Dorothy," he said gravely, "you can see your friend. You have no bad tidings to break to her."

He took his wife's hand as he spoke, and led her up to a hard, horse hair sofa.

A woman was lying there; she was stretched out still and flat; her hands were folded over her breast.

Dorothy looked down at the strangely quiet face, and then she understood.

That worn face wore now a look of amazed and yet of exceeding joy.

Cecilia Digby had passed at a single step beyond death and separation.

THE END.

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